

Gal 10 Of

S E R M O N S

ON THE

FOLLOWING SUBJECTS:

VIZ.

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|---|--|
| I. The Duty of Benevolence and Brotherly Love, and the ill Effects of a Party Spirit. | X. Of Diligence in our spiritual Concerns. |
| II. The Duty and Advantage of studying the Works of Nature. | XI. Of Censoriousness. |
| III. The Folly of opposing the divine Will. | XII. Of Pride and Humility. |
| IV. The Vanity of human Thoughts. | XIII. Of Revenge. |
| V. The Conduct of the <i>Bereans</i> considered, and recommended to Imitation. | XIV. Christianity, and its Author, vindicated from Calumny. |
| VI. The natural Advantages of a Virtuous Course of Life. | XV. The Obscurity and Imperfection of our religious Knowledge. |
| VII. The supernatural Rewards of Virtue. | XVI. Of the different Temptations incident to different Men. |
| VIII. Of Self-Examination. | XVII. Of the Idolatry of Christians. |
| IX. Of Diligence in our temporal Concerns. | XVIII. Of Abounding in good Works. |
| | XIX. Preached on <i>Good-Friday</i> . |
| | XX. Preached on <i>Whit-Sunday</i> . |
| | XXI. Preached in the Time of the Rebellion, in the Year 1745. |

By JOHN BALGUY, M. A.

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Prebendary of SARUM.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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S. E. R. M. Q. N. S.

FOLLOWING

BY JOHN L. O'NEILL
IN THE
IN NO. 10
VOL. II
THE THIRD EDITION

TO THE

Right Reverend Father in God,

B E N J A M I N,

Lord BISHOP of *Winchester,*

A N D

PRELATE of the Most Noble Order
of the GARTER,

THESE

D I S C O U R S E S

Are most humbly and gratefully inscribed

By His LORDSHIP's

Much Obliged,

And most Obedient Servant,

St. John's Coll.
Camb.

THO. BALGUY.

TO THE

Right Reverend Father in God

BENJAMIN

Lord Bishop of Winchester

AND

Treasurer of the Most Noble Order

of the GARTER.



DIS

Are most humbly and gratefully indebted

TO HIS LORDSHIP

Wm. A. Ogle

and the Committee

THEO. BALGUY

London
1841

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S E R M O N I.

The Duty of Benevolence and Brotherly Love, and the Ill Effects of a Party Spirit.

ROMANS XII. Part of the 10th Verse.

Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love.—

TO secure in some measure the observance of this necessary duty, God has framed men's minds with suitable propensities, and engaged them by natural instinct. They are born with kind affections for each other, and cannot divest themselves of them; without grossly corrupting their nature, and doing great violence to their own minds. Every man, who is not thus de-

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praved,

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praved, perceives and feels in himself this disposition; prompting him to do good, and, upon all proper occasions, stirring him up to acts of kindness. The sight of any object in great distress nearly touches him, and, before he has had time to reflect, he finds himself powerfully moved. His very spirits take the alarm, and his heart beats quick with charity and compassion. In short, he finds in himself a warm inclination to relieve the unhappy person, and is in pain till he accomplish it. In like manner, though it be with less emotion, he naturally sympathizes with the happy as well as the miserable; *rejoicing with them that rejoice*, as well as *weeping with them that weep*. He will take a real pleasure in the prosperity of others, and be delighted with every instance of good fortune that befalls them. — This, I say, is the natural temper of men's minds, which accordingly appears, and shews itself, in all that are uncorrupted; who never fail to partake of the joys and miseries of their fellow-creatures. Conscious of this disposition, we stile it *humanity*; thereby not only allowing it to belong to our nature, but appropriating it to our own species. — It may not perhaps be needless to add, that the object of these kind inclinations

tions is also unlimited. We are indeed too apt to restrain natural affection to our kindred, not only in the signification of the word, but in the exercise of what it means; thereby contracting it into a very narrow compass. But this is a corruption of our nature, as well as of our language. For natural affection certainly extends, though in a different degree, to our whole species, and prompts us to embrace mankind with universal good-will. And this is agreeable to the sense of my Text, where the apostle directs this *natural affection* to be exercised and exerted towards *one another*; and moreover requires us to cherish it in this latitude, and *take pleasure in it*. For so the * original most properly signifies.——This being premised, I beg leave to consider briefly, what obligations we lie under, as men, and as christians, to cultivate and improve these kind affections. And,

1st, I would inquire into the *reasonableness* of the duty. That the esteem and affection of our fellow-creatures is a real good, needs no other proof than every man's own experience. If we consider it abstractedly

* Εἰς ἀλλήλους φιλόστοργοι.

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from its beneficial effects, even thus we may discover it to have an intrinsic value ; and that because it is naturally grateful to the mind that possesses it, which of itself is a sufficient reason for its being so generally desired and prized. However, it becomes much more valuable by those benefits and services that flow from it ; esteem and good-will are naturally accompanied with an inclination to perform good offices. Whenever therefore we are in possession of the former, we think ourselves in some measure entitled to the latter ; and for the sake both of the one and the other, we all covet the affections of other men, and are desirous of recommending ourselves to their favour and friendship. From hence it follows by the plainest rule of reason and equity, that we ought to bear good-will towards them : for how can we expect that others should be well affected to us, if we be disaffected, or even indifferent, towards others ? In like manner, how can we pretend to receive kindnesses and benefits, if we refuse on a proper occasion to confer them ? Supposing abilities and opportunities equal, they must needs have the same title to our good offices that we have to theirs ; because no reason or plea can possibly be alleged by
us,

us, but what may equally be alleged by them. The obligations therefore between us are, and must be, reciprocal, and by consequence all men are obliged to be kindly affectioned, and friendly to each other. But,

2dly, We may perceive even a *necessity* of practising this duty, in the very condition and circumstances of our being. Man is by nature weak and indigent, and not capable alone of making any tolerable provision for his own welfare : he is liable to many evils which he cannot redress, exposed to many wants which he is not able to supply, and incumbered with many desires which he knows not how to gratify. In all these respects he stands in need of the protection or assistance of his fellow-creatures ; and the same helpless condition being common to all mankind, necessarily fixes the whole species in a state of dependence upon one another. Hence we find, that they ever had recourse to society, as the common refuge of human infirmities ; where, by a mutual communication of service, and interchange of good offices, they might obtain those comforts of life which were not to be met with in solitude. But how could this point be gained, or how should society turn to any account, without those kind affections, and that

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friendly disposition, which we are considering? If men were generally disinclined to one another; if, instead of kindness and affability, they received each other with aversion and disdain; if they were morose, and unforgivable, contentious, and quarrelsome, prone to give offence, and commit wrongs, and yet impatient of the least injury, and implacable in their resentments; if, I say, such a temper as this generally prevailed, who sees not that society would be a curse, instead of a blessing? Upon this supposition, the best and wisest thing that men could do, would be to break up and disperse, to return into solitude, and even hide themselves in a desert.—But without these extremities, it is evident that the happiness of any community is disturbed and diminished, in proportion to the unkindness and ill-will that arise in it. And even a bare indifference, as far as it extends, defeats the end of society, and renders it useless to mankind. If we turn the supposition the other way, we may discover,

3dly, The great *advantage* of a benevolent disposition. Let us then suppose a society flourishing in peace, and cemented by love; where all the members were inviolably attached to the public good, and harmoniously conspired in the service thereof; where unfeigned good-will,

good-will, and undissembled affection, universally prevailed; where every man was a sincere friend to every man; in a word, where all men vigorously and cheerfully exerted themselves in acts of kindness, and labours of love: What could be more beneficial, or more delightful, than such a temper, and such a practice? What could sooner, or better, or more effectually, advance and establish the public happiness, and the welfare of every individual? The very idea of such a society carries a proof along with it of the point before us, and presents to our view innumerable pleasures and advantages, which, alas! we can only enjoy in speculation.—And as such a disposition has a happy influence on society (which in fact is always proportionable to the prevalence of it), so it produces suitable effects in the minds of all who are blessed with it. For, not to mention that peace and tranquillity which must necessarily arise from the absence of many turbulent and tormenting passions, it may be laid down as a certain truth, that so much benevolence is in reality so much happiness; every exercise of it is naturally pleasing to him who is truly possessed of it; and the higher it rises, and the further it extends, the more delightful it becomes. Generous actions are a perpetual gratification to a generous spirit, and the charita-

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ble man is ever feasting upon his own charities: they often enjoy, in doing good, a greater and more exquisite pleasure than the most refined voluptuary ever tasted.—But the good man's satisfaction is not confined within the narrow sphere of his own abilities. Whatever good is done, or whatever good is received, if it fall within the compass of his observation, or come to his knowledge, he enjoys it in reflection, and it becomes a real addition to his own happiness. The very blessings of heaven that descend every where in such plenty and profusion, all administer to his comfort, and contribute to the increase of his treasure. Wherever they may directly fall, they are sure to rebound upon him; forasmuch as he continually rejoices at them, and is ever well pleased with his neighbour's success. In short, he thus partakes of all the prosperity that he sees or hears of, and is a sharer of every man's joy.

4thly, We may proceed to consider the *excellence* of this benevolent disposition. And most certainly nothing can be more agreeable to the dignity of our natures, nothing can more improve or adorn our minds, nothing can raise them to a higher or nobler pitch. What can be better, what more amiable, than kind affections, and worthy actions? Those
shining

shining characters in history, which have been transmitted down from age to age with so much applause, and charmed every reader; what ingredients do they consist of? Are they not made up of benevolence, kindness, humanity, generosity, public spirit, and the love of mankind? Animated by such principles as these, the benefactors of antiquity performed the most illustrious actions, surmounting all difficulties, and cheerfully sacrificing wealth, ease, liberty, and life itself, to the public good. What wonder, then, if such names be covered with glory, and attract the admiration of all posterity? And in truth there is something so beautiful, so lovely, in beneficence and kindness, that all men of honest and undepraved minds are naturally very much delighted with such eminent examples of them.—But the excellence of this temper chiefly consists in its conformity to the goodness and perfection of God himself, who ^a *maketh his sun to rise on the just and on the unjust.* ^b *Who loads us with his benefits, and crowns us with mercy and loving kindness.* Who showers down on all his creatures, blessings and bounties in the greatest abundance, and is every moment com-

^a Mat. v. 45.

^b Psal. lxxviii. 19. ciii. 4.
communicating

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municating good, and diffusing happiness through a whole universe; and all this without a possibility of any other view, than that of doing good, and making happy.—Whatever then is the best imitation, and the nearest resemblance of this goodness that men are capable of, must needs be most worthy, and most excellent, and conduce in the highest degree to the raising, improving, and accomplishing our natures. And this is the very case of the virtue I am treating of. For certainly nothing can be more divine than love and charity; nothing more god-like than doing good. From whence we may justly conclude, not only that it is God's will we should imitate him herein; but that we should be particularly careful to attain so great an excellence, to arrive at so divine a perfection. Thus far, then, our obligations reach as we are *men*, directed only by the light of nature, and instructed by reason.

We are next to consider ourselves as *christians*, in which view we shall find our obligations carried to a much greater height. Those *kind affections* with which nature and reason jointly inspire us, are by christianity exalted into *brotherly love*: we are not to look upon ourselves as bound only by the
ties

ties of humanity ; we are not to consider our fellow-christians barely as partakers of the same nature, but as *brethren*, in the highest and most sacred sense ; as members of the same body, as partakers of the same redemption, and coheirs of everlasting life. These considerations bind us in a peculiar manner to *brotherly love*. And accordingly the gospel every where enjoins and inculcates it with great strictness. ^a *This is the message*, says the Apostle, *that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*. And indeed it is evident that Christ and his apostles, from the beginning to the end of their ministry, breathed nothing but the purest love, and most *fervent charity*. They earnestly exhorted and urged men to it, and laid the utmost stress on it upon all occasions.—It is styled by the Apostle ^b *the royal law* ; it is represented as ^c *the end of the commandment*, or, in other words, as the main scope and drift of the christian institution. It is said to be ^d *the bond of perfectness*, and ^e *the fulfilling the law*. Our blessed Saviour not only most emphatically calls it ^f *his commandment*, but makes choice of it as

^a 1 John iii. 11.

^b James ii. 8.

^c 1 Tim. i. 5.

^d Col. iii. 14.

^e Rom. xiii. 10.

^f John xv. 12.

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the most proper badge and characteristic of his followers. ^a *By this, says he, shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you love one another.* Thereby plainly informing us, that it is not only an indispensable duty, but a virtue of the highest rank, and the most essential quality of a christian. — And as Christ has given us such precepts concerning love and charity, so he was himself the highest and most perfect example of it that ever appeared in the world. Those characters, however illustrious, which I hinted at before, were as much beneath his, in all respects, as the gentile morality was inferior to the doctrines of the gospel. Whenever we seriously reflect who he was, and what we were, and consider at the same time what he did, and what he suffered, from first to last, for the sinful and unworthy race of mankind; we immediately discover that there never was upon earth any love like his; a love so active, so intense, so unlimited, and so divine, that no words are able to express it, no thoughts to conceive it.

Having thus considered our obligations, as men, and as christians, to perform this duty; I might proceed to observe, and lament the

^a John xiii. 35.

deficiency and disproportion of our practice. I might also point out the chief causes and occasions of it, and endeavour to lay down such rules as seem to conduce most to the promoting of benevolence and brotherly love: but the remainder of my time not allowing of many particulars, I only beg leave to insist upon one, and to offer an expedient, which though perhaps less regarded, yet seems to be of very great importance.

What I mean is, that we would carefully guard our minds against that *spirit of party* which usually prevails so much among us, and to which we seem so unaccountably addicted. It must indeed be confessed, that it is of late considerably abated, and good reason have we to rejoice at it. But then we should not neglect it upon this account; on the contrary, we should look upon this as a fair opportunity of exerting ourselves, and expelling it quite from among us. Since our distemper has remitted, it may now be more easily dealt with. We should therefore use our utmost endeavours to perfect a cure, and to prevent a relapse. It may be justly questioned, whether there be any impediment to love and charity greater and more powerful than this; and therefore
nothing

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nothing is more to be wished than an entire removal of it.

In order whereto we should do well to consider, what various mischiefs and miseries attend it, how many ways it tends to disturb our happiness, and embitter our lives.—And here it were easy to shew, how unavoidably it destroys the *peace of our minds*, by introducing needless disquietudes and vexations, by kindling the most troublesome passions, and blowing up the coals of strife and contention.—It were easy to shew, how deeply it injures our *reputations*, by occasioning a mutual propagation of calumny and slander; by causing the fairest actions to be misrepresented and discoloured; by rendering it almost impossible for any man, with his utmost endeavours, to give a general content, or even gain any approbation out of his own party.—I might also observe how it tends to corrupt our very *understandings*; as it infuses into them innumerable prejudices, and thereby vitiates our judgments; as it draws them off from the evidence of things, and represents to them questions and facts in a false light; as it renders them pliant, and ductile, and easy to be deluded; as it inures them to embrace notorious falsehoods, and digest the most palpable absurdities.

ties.—But more especially we should consider, how ill an effect it has on our *morals*. It lessens our concern for things of great moment, and increases it for matters of no consequence. It inclines us to bigotry and superstition. It tends to confound the very distinctions of good and evil. It undermines justice and mercy, the main pillars of all religion. It roots up our kind affections, and good dispositions; and instead of them fills our hearts with rage and rancour. In short, this party spirit eats into our breasts like a cancer; corrupts and poisons our best humours; and in a great measure devours that love and good-will, which is the chief ornament of our minds, and the glory of our natures.

Nor is it less injurious to the public, than private persons. It is evident from the nature of the thing, and from what has been already observed, that nothing can have a greater tendency to embroil a state, and throw it into the utmost disorder. As sure as love and unity is the great bond of society, so sure is division and strife the bane of it. Those jarring aims, and interfering motions which are produced by it, must necessarily occasion stops and breaches among the wheels of government. And if it rise high,
and

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and be of long continuance, the best and firmest constitution in the world must at last sink under it.—But let us appeal to fact and experience. Does not this abundantly inform us, that where party *strife is, there is confusion and every evil work?* Has it not sometimes thrown us into the most dangerous ferments? Has it not put the kingdom into flames, that nobody knew how to extinguish; and which, in spite of all endeavours, have continued and raged on to the next generation?—It is with good reason believed, that this kingdom can only fall by its own hands. So kind have nature and providence been to us; such is our situation, and so great our strength; that if ever we come to ruin, if ever we be *brought to desolation*, it must be by being *divided against ourselves*; by that intestine strife which preys upon our vitals, and cuts the very sinews of government.—Next to the love of our whole species, our strongest obligations are to the love of our country. And accordingly it is deeply rooted in our natures, and hardly to be effaced by time or accident. What pity it is so noble a passion should ever degenerate, and dwindle into affection for a party!

Should it be inquired, what it is that thus straitens our minds, and contracts our inclinations;

nations; I believe this mischief would be found originally owing to vanity and self-love. For how comes it to pass that we are so much pleased with those of our own party? Because they subscribe to our sentiments, and think as we do. And why are we so much offended at the adversary? Because he rejects our opinions, and follows his own. And what does all this amount to, but a compliment paid to our own understandings? It is not otherwise to be conceived, how the opinions of others come to affect us, either with so much complacency or displeasure.

To these considerations give me only leave to add, what naturally offers itself to our thoughts at this time. As nothing can be more seasonable, nothing more dutiful; so I humbly suppose nothing could be more acceptable to our gracious sovereign, in this beginning of his reign, than for his subjects to make him a joint sacrifice of all their remaining feuds and animosities. How just and solid a pleasure would it give him to see all discord, all variance at an end; and the hearts of his whole people knit together in the bonds of mutual affection! Such a period put to our domestic dissensions, would not only contribute to his repose; would not only

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make his crown fit easy upon his head ; but
very much add to the lustre of it. Nay, it
would redound more to his glory, than hold-
ing the balance of *Europe*, and being the
awful umpire of contending kingdoms.

And as to ourselves, what can be more be-
neficial, what more desirable ? Are they not
our differences and divisions, that chiefly, at
any time, obstruct our happiness ? Is not
this the very evil, that lately hung over us,
like a thick cloud, and darkened our prospect ?
a prospect both then and now filled with
such blessings, as not only intimately affect us,
but promise security and happiness to many
distant generations. If our laws, our liber-
ties, our religion be dear to us, we cannot
but rejoice to see them so firmly guarded,
and strongly fenced : to see the throne
filled by a prince, who, along with the
crown and dignity of his royal father,
inherits his high qualities, and kingly endow-
ments ; who greatly approves and admires
our happy constitution ; who is cordially
devoted to the welfare of his people, and at-
tached to them by inclination and affection,
no less than by interest : to see likewise
round about the throne a hopeful and nu-
merous progeny, blooming in all the gifts of
nature, and blessed with all the advantages of
education ;

education; from their infancy formed to every thing praise-worthy, by a princess of the greatest virtue, and most consummate wisdom:—these and the like blessings, how we may prize, now we have them, I shall not pretend to say; but most certainly, if we had them not, we should desire them above all things, and think them of inestimable value.

Upon the whole, if we have any regard to our own welfare, or the interest of our posterity; if we bear any true love to our king, or our country; let us make it appear by entirely putting an end to our unhappy divisions. Let us no longer exasperate each other by virulent words, and opprobrious terms of distinction; by injurious actions, or disobliging treatment; but *be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love.* Let us distinguish ourselves no otherwise, than by being perfectly well affected to our excellent constitution in Church and State, and to him who happily presides over both. And let no other strife be prolonged among us, except who should be most zealous and active in the service of the public. This we may surely do, without engaging in any party; provided we do but take care to live peaceably and charitably with those who have the misfortune

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tune to be otherwise minded. We are obliged
* *in meekness and gentleness to instruct those who
oppose themselves.* This is the christian rule ;
and no difference of opinion, how wide so-
ever, can ever justify our departure from it.
—To conclude: let us unanimously *follow
after the things that make for peace.* And since
we are blessed with the best constitution,
and the purest religion in the world ; and
with the fairest hopes of a long enjoyment
of both : since Divine Providence has distin-
guished us by numberless mercies and favours
above all the nations round about us ; let
us shew ourselves grateful by a wise, a vir-
tuous, and a peaceable conduct ; and study
henceforward to *walk worthy of the vocation
wherewith we are called.*

* 2 Tim. ii. 25.

S E R.

S E R M O N II.

The Duty and Advantage of studying the
Works of Nature.

JOB XXXVII. Part of the 14th Verse.

*Stand still, and consider the wondrous works
of God.*

THIS admonition of *Elibu's* to *Job*, however improper or needless it may seem, when applied to a person so religiously and devoutly disposed; is certainly very proper, and very needful, in respect of the generality of mankind; which are ever prone to overlook those objects that above all things deserve their attention, and to fix their eyes and hearts on matters of infinitely less moment. Through all the works of nature God has displayed such manifold proofs, such amazing instances of perfect art and consummate skill; has placed before our eyes such a variety of glorious

scenes, and framed every thing in such order and beauty, harmony and proportion ; that it may seem strange men should ever want to be called on to consider them. For what can be more entertaining, what more useful ? What employment more worthy of those sublime faculties which God hath given us, which he hath given us for this very purpose, and by which he hath qualified us for so noble a contemplation ? He has distinguished us with superior powers, crowned us with the divine gift of reason and understanding, and thereby blessed us, if we will be blessed, with a participation of his own image.

Though we worshipped God as duly as we ought, which is far from being the case ; yet still might we fall short of what he requires at our hands, and what even natural reason prompts us to. Can we think it enough, that at certain seasons we offer up our prayers and praises to God, if at all other times we cast him out of our minds, and suffer our thoughts and affections to be alienated from him ? We are employed perhaps about some or other of his creatures ; but how, and with what intentions ? Do we regard them as the workmanship of an all-wise and almighty creator ; observing how exquisitely

sitely they are formed, what ends they promote, and to what uses they serve? Do we take due notice of those perfections which are visible to every eye, and obvious to every understanding? how the world is replenished, and the creation adorned? how wisely every thing is adapted, and how graciously designed?—Alas! these are points which seldom enter our thoughts; and we seem to look upon them as inquiries peculiar to speculative men. If our minds are employed about the works of nature, it is for the most part with a quite different view. Our great care is how to make them subservient to our worldly interest, and administer to our sensual gratification. We are commonly very active in projecting and contriving how to make them answer those ends; but as to the contemplation of that infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, which appear in the formation of them; though it be the chief end of our beings, and the noblest employment of life; yet how grossly it is neglected, and how generally overlooked! In this sense we may justly apply to ourselves the prophet's charge, that we *regard not the works of the Lord, neither consider the operations of his hands.*

It is not to be denied, that we may inno-

cently and lawfully convert the *works of God*, *wondrous* as they are, to our use and profit: nay, he actually designed we should, and ordained it one of the chief employments of human life. Nevertheless he surely expects, that while we are providing for ourselves the comforts and conveniencies of life, we should likewise remember to glorify the giver of them. Though his creatures be intended to yield sustenance and raiment for our bodies, yet without question they are also meant as food and nourishment for our understandings. And if we answer not both these intentions, we abuse our faculties, and debase our nature. If, regardless of our minds, we take thought only for our bodies, what avails our intelligence, and wherein do we excel the brute creation? Are we possessed of high powers and capacities which they want, and is this the ground of our boasting? If we refuse to make a proper use of those powers, let us not boast of them, nor even mention them, lest our triumphs end in dishonour, and our glory become our shame.

It must indeed be confessed, that a great majority of mankind have neither ability nor opportunity for deep inquiries and learned speculations. It is not therefore to be expected that they should make any great progress
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in the study of God's works ; which indeed far surpass the ablest minds, and most enlightened understandings. The wisest and most knowing among the children of men can only, at present, *see them*, as it were, *through a glass darkly* ; cannot penetrate far into the mysteries of nature, and the wonders of the creation. They are able to comprehend, after all their improvements, but a very small part of that amazing skill with which they are formed and conducted. And since the profoundest philosophers are so short-sighted, and so much confined in their inquiries, what can avail the searches and speculations of the rest of mankind ? The answer is, whether they avail much or little to the improvement of science, and the discovery of truth ; it is in every man's power to consider the works of creation in such a manner as to answer, in a good measure, the purposes of religion. The wisdom of God, however unsearchable in some respects, is yet more or less conspicuous, and manifest to every rational creature. Let it not then be supposed, that the exhortation in my text concerns only men of superior skill, and refined understandings ; or that the practice of it necessarily requires a great share both of leisure and learning. No man

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is either so illiterate, or so busy, as to be wholly discharged from this employment. Is it only to men of science, or proficient in astronomy, that *the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work*? Such persons have indeed superior advantages; but all mankind are capable in some degree of perceiving and *considering those wondrous works*, and may find sufficient cause both to admire *them*, and adore their almighty author. Again: every man thinks himself qualified to pass a judgment on works of art, of some kind or other; to discern their agreeableness and beauty, and praise the skill and contrivance of the workman. And shall not the excellence and perfection of the works of nature strike him at all? Has he no talent, no taste for those productions which are all beauty, and in comparison of which the most perfect works of art are coarse and contemptible? Can we be ignorant that the least of God's works infinitely excel the best and finest operations of men's hands? The *very flowers of the field* are so exquisitely framed, so curiously adorned, and so inimitably beautiful, that our blessed Saviour assures us even *Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these*. Whence then comes it to pass, that

we behold the works of God with so much indifference, and so careless an eye? that we are so attentive to the smallest improvements of art, and yet so blind to the matchless graces and glories of nature? What makes this insensibility still more surprising, is the continual presence, or constant succession of the latter. Wherever we turn our eyes, they occur in great variety, and without number; crowd in upon our sight, and as it were solicit our observation. But perhaps the reason lies the other way; and because the wonders of nature are thus common and familiar, therefore we disregard them. If this be the case, it can amount to nothing more than a proof of human weakness, or something worse. For the great plenty and universality of those wondrous works are so far from justifying our neglect, that they aggravate the blame of it; so far from reasonably diminishing our admiration, that they ought vastly to increase it. The more and greater the works of nature appear, the further and more fully they discover to us the perfections of the author. And as to the commonness of such objects; they are indeed commonly *seen*, but not, I fear, commonly *considered*. And supposing they were,
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what would be the consequence? Is it not true in fact, that they who have searched into them the deepest, have admired them the most? A nearer and more accurate contemplation has produced fresh light, as well as fuller satisfaction. If others have been pleased, these have been charmed; while others have wondered, they have been astonished.—But to return: if the employment here spoken of was only matter of curiosity or amusement; we might then be left to our liberty, and proceed as our inclinations should direct us. But it is likewise a real and important part of our duty; and that not only as we are christians, but as men and reasonable creatures. The fruits and effects of it are very considerable; for it directly tends to promote piety and virtue, to produce a right disposition, and a religious frame of spirit. This will better appear, if the subject be considered somewhat more particularly.

The productions of the earth are continually before our eyes: we generally cultivate it with great care, and reap the fruits of it in due season. And thus far our labours are not only innocent, but laudable and good. Yet certainly this, and whatever else we do,
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ought to be done with a constant and habitual view to the glory of God; as it easily may, without any inconvenience, or any disadvantage to our secular designs. And, indeed, what should hinder us from meditating occasionally on those wonderful works which are almost always in our sight? or from reflecting sometimes on the wisdom and goodness of the great creator, who so bountifully provides for the uses and occasions of human life; who *opens his hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing?* And indeed how can this be well avoided, when we behold his liberal supplies, and see *the earth so full of his riches?* Every object we meet with, whether great or small, bears the stamp of an all-perfect creator; is a mark of his wisdom, a monument of his power, and a proof of his goodness: insomuch that it may be difficult for us to determine, whether ornament or convenience, use or dignity, has been more regarded. What perfect art, what incomprehensible contrivance appears in the formation and structure of the vegetable world! What variety and uniformity; what order, symmetry, and proportion of parts! a careful survey of which cannot fail of infusing pious sentiments, and make us cry out with the Psalmist, *Manifold are thy works,*

works, O Lord! in wisdom hast thou made them all.

But further: if from the earth we lift up our eyes to the heavens, and survey the wonders of the firmament, what astonishing instances do we find of the creator's power and perfection! such as every eye may perceive, and every understanding contemplate. Who can see and consider, without the deepest admiration, those vast and magnificent orbs, which shine above us with so much lustre, and roll over our heads in the strictest order and regularity? When the royal penman observes, in the passage before cited, that *the heavens declare the glory of God*, &c. he adds, *there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard*. As if he had said, they loudly proclaim the divine power and wisdom, and speak intelligibly to all mankind; that there is no people so uncivilized, no nation so barbarous, which may not receive both conviction and instruction from the heavenly bodies. So wonderful and grand a scene must infallibly strike even the rudest minds, and produce awful impressions: and a strange disposition must that man have, in whom it does not kindle pious thoughts and devout acknowledgments. To imagine such effects without

out a cause, or to ascribe them to a cause less than divine; is bidding defiance to the faculty of intelligence, and renouncing the character of a rational being. In like manner, to view those illustrious objects unaffected, unconcerned, and without sentiments of admiration; what construction can it bear, but either that of obstinate impiety, or incurable stupidity?

From inanimate things if we proceed to consider living creatures, we shall find still a clearer prospect of infinite power and wisdom. Those heavenly bodies which run their courses with so much pomp, and appear in so great splendor, have yet no higher a principle, than mere matter and motion; which falls vastly short of the principles of life and sense.—When we consider the prodigious variety and multiplicity of animals that replenish this lower world, and how surprisingly they are all framed; when we think of the numberless inhabitants of the earth and the air, and reflect on the wonders of the deep; when we call to mind how the several species are distinguished from each other, and what strange diversity in the whole; how admirably their natures are contrived, and adjusted to the elements wherein they are placed; and also what never-

ver-failing provision is made for their subsistence and preservation; how is it possible for us not to see and acknowledge the marvellous excellence of God's works; or to avoid confessing and proclaiming, that *there is no end of his greatness?*

Nevertheless, our devout wonder will rise still higher, if we turn our thoughts upon ourselves, and meditate seriously on our own frame; if we observe the form and structure, and peculiar dignity even of our bodies; if we consider with the Psalmist, how *fearfully and wonderfully they are made*; how curious and delicate their texture, and yet so firm and vigorous, as to continue unbroken for many years. But above all, if we reflect on the nature, the powers and faculties of our immortal souls, exalted nearly to the angels, and honoured with God's own image; if we observe the compass and extent of their capacities, and the sublime enjoyments for which they are qualified; the contemplation will naturally end in pious wonder and transport, and we shall humbly adore the incomprehensible power and wisdom and majesty of the great creator.

I might go on to *consider the wondrous works of God* in the administration of his providence.

providence. For he preserves and protects the works of his hands in the same wonderful manner wherein He created them. Both furnish inexhaustible matter of meditation, and perpetually give us the justest grounds of celebrating his perfections. And moreover nature and providence further agree in this, that there are unfathomable depths both in the one and in the other. Not much below the surface can we penetrate either; and yet that little we do see, or may see, is abundantly sufficient to answer the ends of religion, if we would but duly attend to the dictates either of reason or revelation. In order to induce us hereto, let us briefly consider the following particulars.

1st, That the practice required in my text directly leads to the advancement of God's glory, which is the very end for which we were created. Herewith our happiness is inseparably connected; forasmuch as whatever promotes the one, infallibly conduces to the other. As we glorify God by considering the works of creation, and thereby discovering the perfections of the author; so we improve our own minds in a peculiar manner, and lay the surest foundation of our felicity. A frequent and attentive con-

templation of God's works is productive both of the purest pleasure, and most rational devotion; and nothing could more contribute to the banishment of impiety and irreligion, than such an employment duly followed. To which may be added, that hereby the grounds of religion are laid before us in a more lively and convincing manner; forasmuch as we thus learn that the homage and adoration which we pay to our maker, is the happiest and most *reasonable service* in the world. But,

2dly, We should consider, that the extraordinary provision which God has made for this employment, is a plain proof of his will, and clearly shews that he expects and requires it at our hands. If the visible works of God were not designed to exercise and entertain our intellectual faculties, why such a profusion of art and skill? Why such an endless variety of ornaments and decorations? The common uses of life require no such thing. That assemblage of beauty which adorns the face of nature, and covers the earth, cannot, we know, contribute any thing to the support and nourishment

nourishment of animals. There is no connection between such a cause, and such an effect. But it was fit the work should bear the signatures of its author, and appear every way worthy of him. And moreover, *the finger of God* was to be discernible every where; that all intelligent spectators might readily discover, and thence adore the omnipotent artist; or, in case of neglect, be left entirely without excuse.

3dly, The peculiar excellence and dignity of this employment is a further recommendation. In relation hereto, I have already observed, that it is the exercise of our best faculties on their noblest objects; and how can our views be carried higher? Or what can more conduce to the elevation and refinement of human understanding? Accordingly it has not failed to engage the best and wisest of mankind in all ages. I may add, that it was the proper and original employment of a state of innocence, and one of the chief entertainments of Paradise. And what still more raises its character, it is the business and the joy of nobler beings than men: an essential

of the bliss of angels, and all the host of heaven. So that if we have no relish for it, the misfortune is plainly owing to the corruption of our nature, and the great pravity and perverseness of our minds.

4thly, and lastly, The contemplation of God's works is a fit preparation for the enjoyments of a future state: which we must not imagine will consist in the rest or suspension of our faculties; or prove a state of indolence and inactivity. To consider and admire the wondrous works of God, and to behold his government of the universe, will doubtless be a principal branch of future felicity. Good reason therefore there is, why we should now begin to inure ourselves to that blessed work, wherein we hope to bear a part to all eternity. If through our own folly and neglect we are quite unaccustomed to it; insomuch that we can feel no pleasure, taste no satisfaction therein; we are so far not only unprepared, but actually indisposed for the heavenly state; and thus a change and renovation of mind becomes absolutely necessary.—To conclude, *whoso is truly wise will surely regard*

regard the wondrous works of God, and seriously consider the operations of his hands; will frequently meditate thereupon, and search into them diligently and devoutly: that he may understand, as well and as soon as possible, the wisdom and loving kindness of the Lord, and fit himself for an eternal habitation at his right hand.

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S E R M O N III.

The Folly of opposing the Divine Will.

ISAIAH XLV. Part of the 9th Verse.

Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker.

CONSIDERING the infinite disparity between God and Man; the perfect wisdom and irresistible power of the one, and the extreme feebleness and frailty of the other; it might be expected that we should absolutely submit to our Maker, and ever resign ourselves to his direction and disposal, not only with a willing mind, but with the greatest comfort, complacency, and satisfaction. For where can our ignorance, and our impotence, find so safe and sure a refuge as

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in infinite wisdom and almighty power? Such a guide, such a guardian, such a governor, we continually need above all things; on whose care of us, and concern for us, we absolutely depend. Without the providence and protection of heaven, our condition would be that of infants exposed, left to lament a little while, and then perish. Poor, helpless, desolate creatures, full of wants and fears, and neither capable of avoiding evil, nor obtaining good! But under such a protection we are, or may be, perfectly secure; and even more than secure, if we can but gain our own consent: for no danger can threaten us, but what arises from this quarter. On God's part nothing is ever wanting; neither will, wisdom, nor power. He is abundantly sufficient to supply all our defects, and answer every purpose that our hearts can wish, or our thoughts conceive. Under his gracious government what have we then to do, but thankfully to submit, and cheerfully to obey? as well knowing that he perfectly understands our true interest, can never fail to consult it, and will certainly accomplish it, if we ourselves do not hinder. — But, alas! we are so inconsiderate, and so unaccountably perverse, as to deprive ourselves,

selves, in a great measure, of this inestimable benefit; and instead of concurring with God's gracious measures, to set ourselves against them, and counter-work them. Instead of submission, behold reluctance; instead of gratitude, murmurs and complaints; instead of obedience, opposition, profaneness, strife, and rebellion! What good can possibly be expected from such a conduct? Is this a likely way to serve or secure ourselves? Did ever any man *harden himself against God and prosper*? So far from it, that this undutiful behaviour leads to all sorts of evil, and is the high road to destruction.—Accordingly we find the Prophet, in my Text, earnestly denouncing a woe against it; *Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker*. That is, who either calls in question his wisdom and authority, or acts in opposition thereto; who disapproves what he has ordained, and is dissatisfied with any part of his government. And to shew the presumption and madness of such a proceeding, he adds, *let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth*. As if he had said, let men contend, when they find cause, with their equals and fellow-mortals, sons of earth like themselves; but let not dust and ashes presume to fly in the face of Omnipotence,

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This impiety, condemned in my Text, may be considered as relating either to God's *dispensations*, or to his *laws*. His will is opposed in both cases; but a different occasion, and a different exhibition, are grounds sufficient for treating the subject under this distinction. When we transgress in the former respect, we are to be considered as *malecontents*; when in the latter, as *rebels*. Both of them characters so unbecoming, so shocking, in man towards his Maker, as cannot well be reflected on without shame and confusion. But to proceed, in respect of his *dispensations*, we may be said to strive with God, when we either repine at the condition of life wherein we are placed, or bear impatiently those trials and tribulations which Providence is pleased to lay upon us. The folly, the wickedness, the ingratitude of such a conduct might easily be shewn at large; but my present subject is the unhappiness which attends it, and the miserable effects which flow from it, as not only exposing us to the divine displeasure, and the fatal consequences thereof; but involving us in continual grief and trouble, and robbing us of the principal comforts of life, — The foundation of all enjoyment is peace and tranquillity of mind; the want of which spoils, in a great measure, the relish of all sorts of good.

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The pleasures of reflection are no more to be tasted without a quiet mind, than the pleasures of sensation are without bodily health. Whatever ruffles men's thoughts, unhinges their faculties, and vitiates their perceptions. What then shall we say to the case of that man, who murmurs at his lot, and frets at his condition? Can tranquillity and discontent, peace and perverseness, dwell together? Will not such a viper in his bosom corrode without intermission, and almost devour every blessing of life? Certainly, till it be expelled, he is not capable of any pure enjoyment, or sincere satisfaction. In short, trouble, and vexation, and unhappiness, are the natural fruits of discontent; which operates immediately and perpetually, and is itself a woe, a present woe, as well as the cause of future wretchedness. — But if a man's condition be low and mean, may he not endeavour, and even *strive* to raise and improve it? Doubtless he may, provided the means he uses be just and honest, and his cares not immoderate and excessive. Such endeavours are so far from being offensive to his Maker, that they are really acceptable, and indeed perfectly agreeable to his will. God not only permits, but requires men to be diligent and active in their callings; blesses their
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honest industry, and often crowns it with peculiar success. But what is this to the discontent here spoken of? May not a man exert himself in life, and be vigorously employed, without murmuring at his condition, or repining at God's providence? Diligence and contentment are never inconsistent. Men may apply themselves to labour and business not only contentedly, but cheerfully; submitting entirely to God's will, and acquiescing in all his dispensations. And herein they are so far from *striving with their Maker*, that they act in concurrence with his wise measures, and true obedience to his commands. —But is it only in a low and obscure condition that men are subject to discontent? Does it not also possess higher stations, and often prevail through all the vicissitudes of life? It may assume perhaps the more pompous name of ambition; but the thing itself is the same, however it be called. Nor is it less disquieting and vexatious when thus exalted; but, on the contrary, much more so. As rising in the world enlarges men's prospects, it extends their inclinations. Old desires are enflamed, and new ones produced; and both of them importunate, clamorous, and insatiable. It is hard to conceive, and harder to express the uneasiness, anxiety, and restlessness

ness of ambition ; which leaps and defies all bounds ; which every thing can swell, but nothing satisfy ; which engages men in endless pursuits, and involves them in inextricable difficulties. And when they have toiled for a long time, and run themselves out of breath ; they find their task, instead of being ended, vastly encreased. Can then such a state, such a disposition as this, admit of any enjoyment ? Is it not rather a scene of trouble and tribulation, and the very picture of misery and sorrow ? — It should also be considered, that besides the present ill effects of discontent and ambition, they utterly disqualify for a happy state hereafter ; thereby doubly excluding men from heaven. And indeed whenever or wherever this distemper takes place, there can be, for such minds, no real happiness. We are sure the inhabitants of heaven will no more be equal, no more upon a level, than the inhabitants of the earth. Subordination and distinction will certainly prevail there as well as here. That is, the saints will be higher or lower, more or less glorified, according to their improvements, and the mansions provided for them. If therefore discontent and ambition were to be admitted, the consequence is very manifest. That blessed state would unavoidably and soon become

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become unblest; and the peace, joy, and harmony thereof be swallowed up in strife, discord, and confusion. In short, such a disposition is utterly inconsistent with a state of happiness and glory. As it once actually transformed angels of light into ministers of darkness; so it will ever have the like effect on men, and turn their nature upside-down, rendering them both a torment to themselves, and to all around them.

Another instance of man's *striving with his Maker* is, as I before observed, impatience under afflictions and calamities. Many evils indeed there are in human life, under which we may, and ought to be displeased, and even greatly dissatisfied. But how, and at whom? Certainly ourselves, who alone can be answerable for evils of our own making, and our own inflicting. These artificial misfortunes, the effects of sin and folly, we bear perhaps too patiently; and if they gave us more disturbance, we should probably guard better against them. Not to mention a great variety of grievances purely imaginary; which have no being, no reality, but what we give them. — The question therefore is not, how we bear these evils; but how we behave under providential afflictions; whether they be sent as chastisements and corrections, or as trials
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of our faith, and exercises of our virtue. Concerning these we may look upon it as a certain truth, that impatience is so far from giving relief, that it adds to our load ; so far from being an effectual remedy, that it doubles the disease. The more we strive and struggle under the weight of any dispensation, the deeper we sink, and the more we endure. Many and strong are the reasons against impatience ; but this is the argument in my Text. And why should we make a needless addition to our griefs and infelicities ? To bear them with patience and moderation will certainly lighten them, and probably shorten them. The hand of Heaven may sooner be taken off the sufferer on this very account ; and if not, he has a title to peculiar supports, as well as a higher reward. However, impatience can turn to no account, and never fails to produce ill effects. And if it be said, that some evils are great and terrible ; it may also be said, truly said, that the helps and comforts of religion are equal to them. No man is ever tempted or afflicted beyond his strength, either natural or supernatural ; and if he exert that strength, and behave as he ought, he will not only be delivered in due time, but greatly favoured and abundantly encouraged. On the other hand, if he harden

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his heart, and refuse to submit; if he suffer his mind to be wrought up into a stubborn frame; if he indulge his impatience in secret murmurs, or open repinings, and undutiful complaints; in a word, if he *charge God foolishly*, and *his heart fretteth against the Lord*; his sufferings, alas! whatever they can be, can only be considered as *the beginning of sorrows*; and he will reap the sad fruits of his impiety both here and hereafter.—By giving the rein to fierce passions, and a rebellious, obdurate disposition, what desperate lengths have men run, and into what dreadful expedients have they been driven! Even so far as to burst the bonds of nature, and lay violent hands on themselves; presumptuously rushing into their Maker's presence without commission, and without leave: as if they meant to refund his gifts, disclaim his bounty, and even to reproach his government. And how wretched, how tragical is that man's fate, who, to escape some present affliction, deserts his station, and takes refuge in guilt! not only opposing his Maker's will, but insulting his authority. How will he, who refused to bear the corrections of Heaven, be able to endure its vengeance? Horrible infatuation! To exchange a light burden, a momentary

momentary misfortune, for an inconceivable weight of woes and sorrows that never end.

Having thus observed the criminal imputation in my Text in respect of God's *dispensations*, it may be further considered in respect of his *laws*. And though it is to be hoped, a considerable part of mankind are not malecontents against God, in the senses above mentioned; yet more or less we are universally engaged in a rebellious opposition. However we may submit to his dispensations, yet in some respects, and in some degrees, we are sure to fail in our obedience to his laws. The best of men are deficient; and therefore in this sense may be said to resist, and *strive with their Maker*. How much more then does this character suit those, who are sunk into vicious habits, and engaged in a dissolute course of life! To persevere in sin and wickedness obstinately and impenitently, is indeed rebelling with a high hand. And what are the natural fruits and effects of such a conduct? Without doubt, many and great disadvantages in hand, and utter ruin in reversion. Either the connection between virtue and happiness, vice and misery, is absolutely necessary; or God has ordained, and immutably fixed it. And whether it be the one or the other, all endeavours to dissolve and disannul it must be in

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vain. We might as well attempt to change the course of sun and moon, as break into God's decrees, or vary his appointments. *His counsel standeth for ever*, be the earth never so unquiet, and the children of men never so mutinous. To expect therefore, that a wicked life should redound to our welfare, and make us happy, at any time or place, or in any possible circumstances, is as weak and groundless a supposition, as ever entered into the heart of man. We may suffer ourselves to be deluded, and drawn in, by sinful lusts, corrupt humours, or depraved appetites; and we may procure them now and then some small gratification; but our main interest is all the while going backward, and our schemes will soon end in misery and perdition. The wicked man walks perpetually on hollow ground; which every moment threatens to sink under him, and swallow him up. And though his condition for the present may seem to smile, and perhaps every thing about him look fair and serene; yet his hopes are mere shadows, and his prospects dreams. They will all vanish in an instant like a morning cloud, and leave nothing before his eyes but terror, and despair, and destruction inevitable.—And even at present he is haunted with dark fears and presages, which continually

tinually disturb his enjoyments, and damp his sensations. In spite of external appearances, he has a worm preying within, which corrodes his vitals, and consumes the little comfort that is left him. Whatever pains he may take to forget himself, to stifle his fears, or drown his apprehensions; it is seldom in his power to silence the clamours of his conscience. This domestic governor not only passes sentence against him; but executes it in part by grievous stings, and growing remorse; which the incorrigible sinner is often forced to conceive as anticipations of his doom. Every vile or base action blots his memory, and becomes his immediate tormentor: and hereafter all his crimes will fall upon him as so many furies, with united rage, and confound him with unspeakable woe.—A vicious course of life not only lays these foundations of misery in the mind, but operates also externally, and naturally produces a great variety even of temporal evils. It is well known to destroy health, and shorten men's days; to injure their reputation, and wound their credit; and in consequence thereof to obstruct their success, and impair their fortunes, notwithstanding any plausible appearances to the contrary. Not to men-

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tion that some vices directly tend to poverty and want, and are visibly producing such effects every day. And as luxury and prodigality waste men's fortunes, and scatter their wealth ; so, on the other hand, avarice, by hoarding and hiding, makes it useless. In both cases the result is poverty, either natural or artificial. In short, vice and happiness can never meet ; as being in reality incompatible. And though wicked men may sometimes seem possessed of prosperity ; yet such a prosperity is a mere appearance, and an empty delusion. A profligate life withers the fairest circumstances, poisons every enjoyment, and converts all blessings into calamities and curses.—But indeed it is almost needless to insist on these outward evils, and temporal disadvantages ; which, comparatively speaking, are light and inconsiderable. The woes denounced in scripture against impenitent sinners, are infinitely more important, and more formidable :—namely, such as flow from the indignation of Heaven, and the rage and smart of a guilty conscience ; the dire effects of which in a future state are neither to be expressed nor conceived. Miserable is the
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case of that man, who has incurred the displeasure, and exposed himself to the double vengeance of God and his own soul; that is, of God and his vicegerent conscience; the truest friends, or most terrible enemies, in the whole world. For as their power is great, so their presence is perpetual. There is no possible escape, or retirement from either. Whether he *ascend* on high, or *make his bed* beneath, they are both *there*. If he *take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea*; they are still both present with him, intimately present, and will be for ever. If he say, *surely the darkness shall cover him; the darkness hideth from neither, but the night shineth as the day*.

Upon the whole, to *strive with our Maker*, in the ways above-mentioned, is a sure and certain course to misery and misfortune; and, if persisted in, must unavoidably end in our destruction. What remains then, but that we be persuaded to sacrifice and submit our wills to the unerring will of our supreme governor? those giddy, inconstant, impotent wills of ours, which are so apt to be carried away by every blast of humour, every breath of inclination. The consequence of which is, that we are continually

54 *The Folly of opposing the Divine Will.*

driven astray ; ever wandering from the true road of life. Whereas the will of God, which we ought to follow, and which we must follow, if we mean ourselves any good, cannot possibly mislead us ; as being at all times. invariably directed by infinite wisdom and goodness. On which account we are bound, both in duty and interest, to an entire submission and conformity. To oppose such a will as this, is the greatest folly, as well as impiety, that can be committed : instead therefore of striving with our Maker, let us strive against our own vices and corruptions. Here there is room for contention and opposition, and we may exert ourselves to the utmost wisely and successfully : but in the other case, our aims and endeavours are as weak as they are wicked, since they can have no effect but what must prove fatal, and terminate in our utter ruin.—I shall only add, that if we are convinced of the necessity of resignation and obedience to the divine will, it behoves us to take heed that it be sincere and entire. To resign in some respects, and stand out in others, will not answer our purpose. We must not presume to compound our obligations, or abridge our duty ; nor to contend with God in behalf of any favourite corruption, or darling sin ; the
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grounds and reasons of our obedience holding good quite through the whole. There can be no exception, no dispensation, whether we consider the deference due to the divine authority, the improvement of our nature, our present welfare, or future felicity. And indeed the fuller and more perfect our obedience is, the more effectually we promote all these ends ; which is the greatest encouragement that can be thought of for an uniform and vigorous discharge of our duty. We should therefore strive to *abound in the work of the Lord ; forasmuch as we know, that no endeavour can be lost, no labour in vain in the Lord.*

[illegible]

S E R M O N IV.

The Vanity of human Thoughts.

PSALM XCIV. II.

*The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man,
that they are vanity.*

IN the foregoing verses we find the Psalmist confuting the wild pretence of impious men, who denied the providence of God, and maintained that he took no cognizance of human actions: nay, their impiety and presumption were carried so far as to pronounce him altogether insensible of the ways of men. The Psalmist having pointed out the shocking absurdity of such a notion, proceeds to prove, that God is so far from being ignorant or unmindful of the proceedings of his creatures, that our very *thoughts* are distinctly known to him, and all the

the imaginations of our hearts lie naked before him. And as God perfectly *knows the thoughts of man*, so we find moreover in my text, that he knows them to be *vanity*: a point very proper to be considered by us in a more particular manner. Though *divine omniscience* be now universally owned, yet *human vanity* is neither so readily acknowledged, nor so clearly perceived. Nevertheless we may easily discover, that the character is just, and holds good in more senses than one. The *thoughts of man* are egregiously *vain* whenever they are wicked. Of all the vanities under the sun, without question sin is the greatest: and accordingly the scripture represents it as such; not only stiling it vanity, but often branding it under the strongest appellations of folly and madness. The *thoughts of man* are also *vain* in another sense; whenever they are ill-grounded, and destitute of the supports of reason and truth. There are many notions taken up, many opinions maintained, not from any real proof, or force of evidence; but merely because they strike in with some favourite inclination, and flatter the vanity of men's minds. Now such thoughts, supposing them not wicked, must be weak at least, and the effects of ignorance and folly. Even
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when they are innocent in their causes and occasions, they are often mischievous in their tendencies, and inconsistent with that decency and sobriety of thought which the gospel requires. Of these then I shall briefly consider a few remarkable instances; partly in order to shew what errors we are apt to run into, and partly to make us avoid those inconveniencies which attend them.

Amidst the great diversity of human thoughts, none perhaps are more proper to be taken notice of on this occasion, than those relating to ourselves. I mean, concerning our nature and condition, the powers and operations of our minds, and the conduct and regulation of life.—I begin with those we commonly indulge and entertain concerning our nature, situation, and condition; which we shall find utterly vain, and void of all solid foundation. Scarce any thing perhaps does man reflect on with greater pleasure, than his being placed at the head of the visible creation; his enjoying a dominion over the rest of God's works, and being constituted, with almost absolute authority, lord over them all. He discovers a long series and subordination of creatures below him, obsequious to his will, and submitted to his use: he beholds the earth, the
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sea, and the air, replenished with an inconceivable variety of animals; all distinguished from himself, by a great disparity of nature: he finds a peculiar dignity in the frame and structure of his body, and still greater in that of his mind; which he feels enriched with high faculties and noble endowments, and qualified for the sublime offices of virtue and religion. By such ideas and conceptions man is apt to be too much exalted; for whatever truth may be in them, there is certainly a greater share of vanity and partiality. While he thus triumphs here below, he forgets to look upward; forgets to contemplate the numberless host of heaven; those illustrious beings which live and move in far higher spheres than his own. 'Tis not enough that he acknowledges the existence of angels and blessed spirits, which the scripture will not suffer him to disbelieve: 'tis not enough that he knows and confesses their superiority, if at the same time he considers them only as one order, or species, or class of beings; for such a contemplation can only serve to feed his vanity, by making him imagine that he is much nearer the top of the creation than he really is. Though the various kinds above us are promiscuously stiled angels in scripture, as being all agents
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and ministers of the great creator's will ; yet the same scripture sufficiently informs us, that there are innumerable orders comprehended in that general term, and those rising above one another in dignity and perfection, and approaching nearer to their maker by regular steps and degrees. 'Tis agreeable both to scripture and reason to suppose a vast distance between the highest and lowest orders ; some of which may perhaps rise as far above man, as man is above a worm or an insect. As therefore we ought not to *measure ourselves by ourselves*, as the Apostle expresses it ; so neither ought we to measure ourselves merely by those creatures which are placed beneath us ; but also and chiefly by those which are fixed above us, and blessed with a nearer resemblance to the author of all perfection.—It is very reasonable and fitting that man consider himself in this view, in order to discover his true rank and situation in respect of the whole system. Does he see below him a great multitude and variety of inferior creatures ? Let him call to mind the vast number of superior ones, exalted far above him. Does he take a pleasure and a pride in considering, that of all earthly creatures himself is the highest ? His vanity will, or ought to be sufficiently checked,

checked, if he also consider, that of all rational and intelligent creatures himself is the lowest. For this indeed, as far as we know, is the very truth of the case. The former is, in reality, no mighty matter of triumph, since all the creatures which he finds beneath him are void of understanding. The principal inquiry is, or ought to be, what rank he bears among such beings as are intelligent, and partakers of the divine image. Is he then at the top of these, or any thing near it? So far from it, that we find him placed at the very bottom; and, as far as appears, in the lowest class of all.—This consideration, if duly attended to, would certainly correct the vanity of our thoughts, and cast down our high imaginations; would give us a truer idea of human nature, and reduce our pretensions to their proper bounds. It is by no means the design of these reflections to disparage humanity, and render it contemptible in our own eyes; but only to rectify a false estimate, and make us *think soberly of ourselves, as we ought to think*. We may reasonably boast with the Psalmist, and bless God, after his example, that we are *made little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honour*. Man has doubtless just cause to rejoice, and be thankful, that he has
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any lot among rational creatures; as being thereby rendered capable of the knowledge and enjoyment of his maker. But lest this consideration should inspire vanity, and swell him with pride and presumption; it can never be improper to remind him of his true situation, and set before him those powers and perfections which are so much greater and higher than his own. In short, when man is compared with inferior creatures, the dignity of his nature is readily discovered, and confessed; but when compared with superior orders, the invisible host of heaven, his rank is not only diminished, and his figure obscured, but rendered little and mean, and almost inconsiderable.

But to proceed: Another vain thought very apt to mislead us, and perhaps a consequence of the former, is that which follows: finding ourselves placed at the head of the visible creation, and the whole in subordination and subjection to ourselves, we are apt to imagine every thing here below created solely on our accounts, and for our sakes. We do indeed discover in most of them a wonderful subservience to our convenience and welfare; perhaps as great, as if they had been made entirely for man. Nevertheless, it is not to be doubted, but other ends also were intended in

in their production. God's infinite goodness prompts him to propose, and his infinite wisdom and power enable him to execute, a great variety of ends at the same time, and by the same means. Without question he intended those creatures, of whose lives we are often too prodigal and careless, should have some enjoyment of their own beings, as well as conduce to the improvement of ours. Accordingly we find it one part of a good man's character, that he *regardeth the life of his beast*; and many instances are observable in scripture of a providential care extended even to irrational creatures, as might be shewn at large. From whence it appears, that our dominion over brute creatures is not so absolute and unlimited as we commonly imagine; and likewise, that our use and convenience is not the sole end of their creation. Even inanimate creatures, which can have no enjoyment of their beings, manifestly conduce to other purposes besides those which concern mankind. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handywork*; as the Psalmist nobly expresses it. But can we think they *declare* and *shew* it only to the children of men? Do we not know, that there are myriads of other beings, who see the same glorious

rious objects, and that much more fully and distinctly than we can pretend to? The blessed angels are every way more worthy spectators of the Almighty's works; as being both more able and more willing to make a right use of such a privilege. We only see them imperfectly at present; and what we can see, we seldom behold with due attention: so that the wonderful excellence of God's works is, in a great measure, lost upon us, and perhaps redounds as much to our shame, as to our Maker's glory. Whereas the case is far otherwise with those pure and perfect beings; who, as they are qualified for a fuller search into the mysteries of nature, and the depths of divine wisdom; so they never want an inclination for that blessed employment. They carefully and constantly *regard the works of the Lord, and consider the operations of his hands.* 'Tis their delight, their happiness, attentively to survey those glorious objects, which are beheld by us with so much indifference; or rather from which we so stupidly turn away our eyes. While their thoughts are bent on glorifying the great Creator, and celebrating his praise; ours, alas! are commonly fixed on trivial scenes, and worthless pursuits.—Can we then be so vain as to imagine, that the heavens were

thus richly furnished, and wonderfully adorned, merely on man's account, who contributes, we see, so very little to the promotion of that great end for which they were created? To which may be added, that various discoveries of these latter ages abundantly confute the arrogance and absurdity of such a conceit; since the whole earth whereon we live, the theatre of mankind, is found but a small habitation, I may say a mere point, in comparison of the universe. Whoever considers this, for the fact is unquestionable, will be ashamed of grasping at so groundless an honour, and centering, as it were, the whole creation on human-kind.

Having observed the *vanity* of man's *thoughts*, in respect of his nature in general, I shall now proceed to shew, in a particular instance or two, his vain and erroneous manner of thinking concerning the powers and operations of his own mind. These are indeed the chief perfections of our nature, and must be allowed very considerable in themselves: but we are apt to magnify them beyond measure, and to lay more weight and stress upon them than they will really bear: especially in this present state; wherein our minds, united to such frail bodies, act under great disadvantages, and cannot exert them-

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selves as they may, and will do, hereafter. But, unmindful of this, we often presume very much on the strength of our faculties, and promise ourselves great success in the pursuit of knowledge, and the search of truth. But these *thoughts* are *vain*, as experience informs us. We may say we *will be wise, but it is far from us*; as we learn from the wisest of all the children of men. *We wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness*, as the prophet assures us. And the apostle expressly declares, that *if any man think that he knoweth any thing, (that is, adequately and perfectly) he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know*. So impotent is man's understanding, and so defective his knowledge! 'Tis true indeed that we know, or may know, whatever is requisite for the great business of life: that is, we may know our duty, and plainly discover what is required at our hands, in order to secure the favour of God, and the hopes of eternal life. But as to other matters, we are generally much in the dark.—When we are newly set out in quest of truth, and have taken a few steps in the pursuit, we are prone to expect great things, and to flatter ourselves with most agreeable success. But time and trial soon undeceive

us, and we are sure to be convinced by the vanity of our hopes. As soon almost as we are launched into the deep, we find our faculties failing, and our intellects foundering : and the further we proceed, the more sensible we become of our ignorance and imbecility. . We commonly embrace at first a set of errors, and fancy ourselves possessed of so many truths. We believe our understandings enriched with clear principles, and certain maxims, when we have only collected a stock of mere prejudices : so that, instead of the fruits of true knowledge, our minds appear over-run with weeds ; which must be carefully plucked up before we can make any further progress. Nay, it often happens, that those errors which we once imbibed, take such fast hold of us, that we can never shake them off as long as we live. And supposing them removed, we are nothing advanced. Like travellers who have been wandering out of their way, we are only returned into our road ; or perhaps to the place from whence we set out. But as this is no progress, so we are still liable to deviate every moment. For errors may be, and often are rectified, while truth remains undiscovered and untouched. —I shall only add, as a farther proof of the weakness of human understanding, that there is not any one thing in nature truly understood,

stood, and thoroughly comprehended by us. The meanest and minutest thing in the world contains difficulties insuperable to man: the most contemptible weed that we tread under our feet is sufficient to puzzle the profoundest inquirers, and baffle the penetration of the ablest philosophers. Which consideration, if duly regarded, would effectually cure our vanity, and confound the utmost pride of human understanding. In short, our faculties at present seem fitter for action than speculation, and more conducive to practice than knowledge; and what we can acquire of the latter may be supposed entirely in order to the former.

But further; we are very apt to fail and fall short, not only in the pursuit of *truth* but also of *happiness*. It is frequently observable, that either our designs are wrong; or, if right, not duly executed: and the common consequence of either is want of success. Though we are apt to ascribe our failures and disappointments to very different causes, yet it cannot be doubted but they are generally owing either to the shortness of our understandings, or the corruption of our wills. This is a point which we are always unwilling to own, and backward to believe. For who does not pretend to know perfectly well

wherein his interest consists, and how it is to be promoted? Though we cannot always *obtain* the means, yet we never doubt but we *understand* them. But how vain, for the most part, is such an imagination! as will readily appear, if the point is not to be determined by experience. If the interest and welfare of mankind be so well understood, as they commonly suppose, how comes it to pass that they often take such foolish courses, and run headlong into their own ruin? Is it any proof, or any sign of true wisdom, that we so negligently provide for futurity? that we take so much care and pains for a short life, and so little for eternity? Can they be said to understand their own interest, who, though destined for immortality, look no farther than the grave? This consideration, though abundantly sufficient of itself to confute our pretensions, yet is only part of the evidence which appears against us. Even the true interest of this life is very often either not understood, or grossly neglected.—Had the voluptuary all those pleasures at command which his heart is set on, he concludes, and even takes it for granted, that he should be completely happy. And yet it is as certain as universal experience can make it, that no greater misfortune could befall him; nor

any thing more contribute to hasten his ruin. This would only give him a power of destroying most effectually and speedily both soul and body. Besides, what is that bewitching pleasure which he so eagerly aims at? Is it any other than what he enjoys in common with brutes; and for which many of them are qualified better than himself? Can he possibly think, that the image of God was planted in him for such a purpose as this? Let common sense then decide, whether that man can be allowed to understand his own interest, who, instead of aspiring to an equality with saints and angels, chooses the character of a libertine, or sinks down to a sot?

———Again, the same observations may be applied, with little alteration, to the pursuits of avarice and ambition, which are manifestly repugnant to man's true interest both here and hereafter. They expose men to anxious cares, perpetual fatigues, and endless vexation, to no manner of purpose; prompting them, without intermission, to the gratification of desires utterly insatiable. In these cases, their business is never done, their work never at an end; and indeed never possibly can. For the more honour and wealth men obtain, so much more craving, restless, and impatient they grow. So that, in reality, every acqui-

tion is loss, and every success disappointment. In short, the ambitious man climbs and struggles till his head be made giddy, and his heart sick; while the infatuated miser grasps at every thing, and enjoys nothing.—Where then is the boasted wisdom of worldly men? Can he be admitted wise, who is not wise for himself, or can he be supposed wise for himself who misses his true good, and takes the direct way to make himself miserable? But further, if all such extremes were avoided, and men generally made a better use of the things of this world; yet still, if they placed their happiness here below, they would be exceedingly deceived. The goods of this life, though enjoyed to the best advantage, cannot amount to real happiness; and therefore it must always be weakness and folly to expect it. We might as well look for fair fields and fruitful meadows on the top of a barren mountain, as seek for true and solid happiness in this world. It is contrary to the nature of things, and the intentions of the Almighty; who has immoveably fixed it in another and a better place.

Upon the whole, the foregoing observations and instances will not suffer us to doubt of the *vanity* of human *thoughts*: a doctrine however mortifying, yet by no means useless; as it tends to inspire us with that humility
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and sobriety of mind, that consciousness of our infirmities, and that diffidence of our own judgments, which peculiarly become such ignorant and imperfect creatures. And this is more especially requisite in the affair last mentioned: partly as we are very prone to miss the true road to happiness, and partly as God has been pleased to mark it out for us; and has given us such rules and directions as, if carefully followed, cannot fail to lead us to it, and effectually secure us from all error and deviation. The great question therefore is, whether we will trust to our own giddy counsel, and blind conduct; or commit ourselves to the direction of unerring wisdom: that is, whether we will stumble on in the dark among pits and precipices, or walk in open day-light, and clear sun-shine. And is it not a shame, that such a point should ever come into question among rational creatures? Can we distrust the security of Heaven? Or is man wiser than his Maker? We are infallibly assured, that the only way to true and lasting happiness, is submission to God's will, and obedience to his laws; and if we forsake this way to follow our own inventions, what words are sufficient to express our folly!

———To conclude, if we make any difference between good and evil, happiness and misery,

misery, welfare and destruction; and if we have any share of real kindness for ourselves; let it be shewn in this great and important concern. On our present choice, and our present conduct it depends, whether we are to rejoice, or repent for ever. Let us therefore, without hesitation, embrace that wisdom which is from above, and give ourselves up to its direction: that, led by so sure a guide, we may not fail of success; but *have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*

S E R M O N V.

The Conduct of the *Bereans* considered, and recommended to Imitation.

ACTS XVII. 11.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind; and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

THE persons of whom my Text makes this honourable mention, were the *Jews* of *Berea*, a city in *Macedonia*. Hither *Paul* and *Silas*, as we find in the foregoing verse, were sent by the brethren, to preach the word of God, and propagate the gospel;

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gospel; the great design which the apostles every where pursued in so unwearied a manner. In the beginning of this chapter, we read they came to *Thessalonica*; where, in a *synagogue of the Jews*, Paul reasoned with them out of the *Scriptures*; opening and alleging, that *Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead*; and that *Jesus*, which he preached unto them, was the *Christ*. How ill a reception he and his assistant here met with, we may learn from what immediately follows: *The Jews moved with envy*, and assembled in a tumultuous manner, *set all the city in an uproar*, and assaulted the house in which these apostles resided. *Paul and Silas* were maliciously accused by them of acting contrary to the decrees of *Cæsar*, and setting up *Jesus* for a king in opposition to him. Such was the treatment which they met with from the *Jews of Thessalonica*. But the minds of the *Bereans* were differently affected, as being indeed *more noble and generous*. They were so far from committing the same riotous disorders; so far from giving any disturbance to *Paul and Silas*; that, as we read in my text, *they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched*

searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so: That is, whether the apostles' preaching was conformable to their Scriptures of the Old Testament; and how it agreed with the prophecies and declarations therein contained. In treating on these words I shall,

First, Enquire into the conduct of the *Bereans*, as the ground of the applause here given them. And,

Secondly, Consider what is proper to be observed from thence for our own use and direction.

First, I am to enquire into the conduct of the *Bereans*, whereon is grounded the applause here given them. That they are here applauded is very manifest. For though, according to the literal meaning of my text, their behaviour is only represented as better than theirs in *Thessalonica*; which it might be without meriting any praise; yet, according to the usual construction of speech, we are to understand by the expression, that the *Bereans* were really praise-worthy; and that they behaved

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haved themselves upon this occasion in a wise and dutiful manner.—To proceed therefore; one part of their conduct and character is, *that they received the word with all readiness of mind*; that is, they willingly and gladly gave ear to the apostles' doctrine, and were ready to embrace it, as soon as sufficient evidence of the truth of it should appear to them. In the mean time they gave due attention, as became them, and as the weight and importance of the subject required. They discovered no ill-will, no disaffection towards those that preached it to them; but heard them candidly and favourably, without prejudice or prepossession, and with minds open to conviction.—As they were *men*, and reasonable creatures, they shewed themselves willing to be informed and instructed; and were fairly disposed to receive the truth, whoever offered it; especially such truth as appeared to be of the greatest moment, and immediately related to their duty and welfare.—As they were *sinful men*, and transgressors, with the rest of the world, against the laws of God; they thought they had the utmost reason to listen joyfully to the tidings of a Saviour,

our, who, as they were told, had redeemed all mankind from their sins, and expiated their guilt; who had moreover brought men salvation, and made known to them the way to eternal life. They were sensible this was a matter of the greatest consequence; and whether these tidings proved afterwards true or false, that they well deserved, in the mean time, their most serious attention and examination. —

Lastly, As they were *Jews*, to whom the promise of a Messiah was more immediately given, they looked upon themselves as particularly concerned to hearken to those who preached him to them; who declared that he was actually come into the world, and had already answered the ends of his coming. Such an account as this ought to be peculiarly welcome to the *Jews*, as they were then expecting it with the utmost impatience. The Gentile world was not pre-acquainted with the great author of their redemption, and happiness; but sat in darkness and ignorance; not expecting a Saviour, and scarce knowing that they wanted one. But he had long before been revealed and promised to the *Jews*; to whom therefore the news of his arrival ought to be

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be in a particular manner grateful and good. Accordingly the *Bereans* acted like men that had a just sense of this matter ; hearing the apostles, and *receiving the word with all readiness of mind*. They only desired a reasonable proof and confirmation of this weighty truth ; and to that they immediately applied themselves with great diligence and cheerfulness.

What further recommends their conduct, is their divesting themselves of those prejudices which possessed the generality of the *Jews*, and hung upon the minds of almost the whole nation. Their thoughts and expectations were wholly fixed on a secular Messiah, who, by force of arms, might rescue them from the *Roman* yoke, and re-instate them in their former grandeur and independence. Upon this account our Saviour, whose figure and appearance promised nothing like this, but rather quite the contrary, was rejected by them with great scorn and contempt. His completion of prophecies, the number and greatness of his miracles, the divineness of his doctrines, availed nothing with those, whose inclinations were immoveably fixed on a temporal deliverer. This then being the com-

mon disposition of the *Jews*, it was highly praise-worthy in the *Bereans* to lay it aside; to break through so general a prejudice, and give such a fair and impartial hearing to the apostles.

The other part of the character, and the praise given them in my Text, is, that they *searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so*. That is, examined whether the apostles' declarations were conformable thereto; and whether the Messiah now preached to them, answered the descriptions and characters given by the prophets. Now as hearing, and *receiving the word, readily* shewed the honesty of their minds; so their thus *searching the Scriptures* is a proof of their wisdom and good understanding. How good and acceptable soever the apostles' doctrine might be; it was certainly proper, before they embraced it, to satisfy themselves about the truth of it; that they might not expose themselves to delusion and disappointment. Without this, neither could their joy be reasonable, nor their faith well grounded. Though they readily heard the apostles, and gave attention to their preaching; they knew it was not fitting to give their assent, without previous satisfaction, and proper evidence. And herein likewise their proceeding

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was manly and rational, and such as became lovers of truth.——As to that particular way wherein they sought satisfaction, it was manifestly the most secure that could have been taken by *Jews*. They had a former revelation in their custody, and could admit of no other that appeared contradictory thereto, or inconsistent therewith. So far therefore they were under a necessity of trying the apostles' doctrine by that rule, and bringing it to that test. But further, the expected Messiah was spoken of in their own scriptures. Their prophets had pointed him out and described him at large; setting forth his person and appearance, under a great variety of circumstances; and laying down many marks and signs by which he might be known, whenever he should arrive. It was therefore necessary to examine, whether those prophecies were fulfilled, and those descriptions answered in *him*, whom the apostles now preached to them. On this account it was, that they *searched the Scriptures*; and it appears from my Text, and from the nature of the thing, that this part of their conduct likewise was good and laudable. Upon the whole, we see how the *Bereans* merited the praise here given them. They readily gave ear to the apostles'

stles' doctrine, and then examined it in a proper manner. Being neither backward to give attention, nor hasty in surrendering up their belief; they happily avoided the extremes of obstinacy and credulity. I come now in the

Second place, to consider what we are to observe from hence for our own use and direction. *First*, then, we cannot but observe, that the *Bereans* are a fit pattern for our imitation, in respect of the good disposition which they shewed for the reception of truth. Truth in general is the food of our minds; and therefore it must be unnatural, as well as unreasonable, to be negligent and indifferent about it. We ought to maintain a perpetual inclination for it, and gladly to give it admittance whenever it is offered. If our faculty of understanding be valuable in a high degree, as we universally acknowledge it is; it must be upon account of the excellence of its object. In vain are we capable of coming to the knowledge of truth, if we take no care to obtain it. If incapacity be a misfortune, yet however it is no crime: but voluntary ignorance is both; as implying an abuse of a talent that God has given us.—And as we ought

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to be well-affected towards truth in general, so more especially ought we to regard such truth as is of the greatest consequence, and affects our highest interest. Now religious truth claims the preference of all others, because religion is the first and greatest concern we have. The prosperity of our souls depends upon it: to discover the true religion, is to find out the way to eternal life. This therefore merits above all things our care and attention. In order to obtain the favour of God, and the happiness consequent thereupon, it is necessary that we discharge those duties which are incumbent on us. And in order thereto, we must know what they are, and what it is that God expects from us. If he has fixed certain terms and conditions of salvation, and pointed out a way wherein we are to walk; it highly concerns us to be rightly informed about this matter. And if we have means and opportunities of knowing it, and yet remain ignorant; that ignorance must be inexcusable. In short, whatever way God is pleased to communicate his will to us, we must attend to it reverently, and receive it *with all readiness of mind.*

But, *secondly*, we should do well to imitate the *Bereans* in their impartial and unprejudi-

ced manner of proceeding. In vain do we hearken with due attention, if we be any way disabled, or indisposed for passing a right judgment on what we hear. Now prejudices in the understanding are the same obstacle to the nourishment of the mind, that disorders in the stomach are to the sustenance of the body. A readiness to hear and learn, without an impartial disposition, is only an appetite without a power of digestion. And as this must needs produce ill effects in general, so it is peculiarly mischievous in respect of the truths of religion; the importance of these being infinitely greater than any other. The knowledge of our duty is necessary in order to the performance of it, and on the performance of it our security and welfare ultimately depend. We cannot here err with impunity, if our errors be in any degree wilful; as those generally are which spring from prejudice and partiality. Without doubt it is ordinarily in our power to keep our minds rightly disposed; and supposing it otherwise in any case, yet our utmost endeavours must be used before we can be entitled to such a plea. In short, it concerns us to take all possible care, that we intercept not the light of heaven, nor disqualify ourselves for the

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reception of the saving truths of our most holy religion. Not as *lovers of darkness*, hardening our minds against conviction; not *corrupting the word of God*, or *perverting the Gospel of Christ*; but receiving the truth in the love thereof, with simplicity and singleness of heart. But,

Thirdly, From the character here given the *Bereans*, we may learn the folly and absurdity of *implicit faith*; that is, of blindly surrendering up our belief without previous inquiry, and due examination. For those men are applauded in my Text for taking a quite contrary method. They did not embrace the apostles' doctrines till they had brought them to the test, and compared them with the Scriptures, their acknowledged rule of faith. And this we find was a laudable practice: from hence then it follows very plainly, that implicit faith is so far from being our duty, that it is in reality blameable, and therefore to be avoided.——How hard is it then, that such a faith as this should nevertheless be required by the *Romish* church of all its members? How strange and shocking, that any body of christians should be enjoined to believe implicitly, and blindly, when

when the praise of the *Bereans* is upon record in scripture for refusing to believe so !

If it be said, that the *Bereans* were at years of maturity before they were profelyted to the christian faith, and that upon this account their case was quite different from that of modern believers, who are generally admitted into the church in their infancy, and by consequence incapable of passing any judgment; I answer, that those who are admitted in their infancy, are nevertheless obliged, as soon as they come to age, to satisfy themselves, as far as they are able, concerning the truth of that religion into which they are brought, and the purity of that church to which they belong. Otherwise they profess they know not what, and believe they know not why. If a man can give no better reason why he is a *Christian*, or why he is a *Romanist*, than that he was brought up such; he says no more for himself, than what may be said by a *Pagan* or a *Mahometan*.

But it is alleged by the *Romish church*, that its members have infallibity to rely on; and therefore may securely believe, without examination, whatever articles of faith are imposed on them. The falsity of this pretence has been proved even to demonstration.

88 *The Conduct of the Bereans considered,*

However, supposing it otherwise; it is certain, that the apostles were infallible in what they taught; as being directed by the infallible Spirit of God. How happens it then, that the *Bereans* are nevertheless commended for examining the apostles' doctrine before they embraced it, and for proving it by a rule which they have in custody? I presume it will be said, that they were not yet convinced of the apostles' infallibility, and therefore could have no regard to it. To bring this to the present case, is there not equal reason, that the members of the *Romish* church should be convinced of its infallibility, before they trust to it? How then is this point to be proved, or where is such conviction to be met with? Why, the Scriptures are appealed to in proof of it; but whether in earnest, or in mockery, is hard to say. For how is it possible for those men to find satisfaction about it in the Scriptures, who are not allowed so much as to look into them? The case therefore is plainly this: they must believe all the articles of their supposed faith, because their church is infallible; and they must believe their church is infallible, because it tells them so. What a foundation is here for implicit faith! Thus then we plainly see
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how diametrically opposite the conduct of the *Romish* church is to that of the apostles: by the one, men are commended for opening and searching the Scriptures; by the other, they are commanded to shut them.

But to return: Nothing is to be found in the Scriptures, that even seems to countenance *implicit faith*. *Beloved*, says the apostle, *believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God. Prove all things, says another, hold fast that which is good.* These, and many other declarations of a like nature, are utterly irreconcilable with such a faith as we are speaking of. As all true religion is, and must be, a *reasonable service*; so pure and undefiled christianity, the more it is proved and examined, the better it will be esteemed, and the greater satisfaction it will surely give. If any of its professors be jealous of having their doctrines examined, and brought to light; they may have good reason, perhaps, to apprehend danger. They may be afraid, perhaps, of having their beloved errors detected, or their profitable corruptions exposed. Let them therefore be jealous, who have cause to be so. We have no grounds for any such fears or apprehensions. Pure and uncorrupted

rupted christianity dreads no trial that is fair, no examination that is honest ; but invites men to search into it, and even acknowledges those to be its best votaries, who search into it the deepest ; provided they do it sincerely, and in a proper manner. Did the apostles apprehend any ill consequence from the inquiries and examinations of the *Bereans* ? or did they discountenance them in any degree ? On the contrary, we find those men are highly commended for such rational proceeding, and their name transmitted to posterity with honour and applause. We may justly therefore look upon them as a proper pattern for our imitation ; both in respect of their impartiality and their integrity.—Our religion we profess only to derive from reason and scripture ; and thither we refer men for the discovery of its truth and excellence ; not doubting but it will ever be found strictly conformable to both. It is a disgrace to christianity not to suffer it to be examined ; and is a double disgrace to it to shut up the Scriptures by which it is to be examined.

It must indeed be confessed, that men may make an ill use of the holy Scriptures, and even *wrest them to their own destruction*. But does it follow, that the generality of christians ought

ought to be deprived of them upon that account? What good thing is there in the world which may not be abused and perverted? All the blessings of life, nay, our very senses and understandings might be forfeited by this rule; forasmuch as all these are sometimes abused and misemployed. It is indeed remarkable, that the same authority which forbids men the free use of the Scriptures, condemns also the free use of their understandings, and even requires them to disbelieve their senses. And what wonder if they, who take away the light of revelation, do likewise endeavour to extinguish the light of nature?

But to return: Since it is acknowledged that we may make an ill use of the Scriptures, it certainly concerns us in a very particular manner to beware of so doing. A great part of them is so plain, as to be intelligible to the most ordinary capacities. Other parts are less plain, and some even difficult and abstruse to every reader. And though we ought not to be debarred the study even of these, yet if we have not that capacity, and those acquired talents which are requisite for the unfolding of them, it is neither reasonable nor safe to pretend

tend to it. Though it be every christian's undoubted privilege to judge for himself, yet certainly that privilege is abused, when men take upon them to judge in such cases as are quite out of their reach. It can never be required of any man, that he should understand those parts of Scripture, of the meaning of which he finds himself utterly unqualified to form any judgment. In these cases he ought to suspend, and determine nothing; as being the wisest and securest course he can take. In like manner, those who are better qualified to judge, make an ill use of Scripture, when they apply themselves to the interpretation of it with prejudice and prepossession; when, instead of inquiring sincerely for the true sense of it, they endeavour to bend and accommodate it to their own preconceived opinions;—such a proceeding being utterly inconsistent with that love of truth, and that deference for inspiration, which are indispensably required of all christians.——Lastly, we must carefully avoid the spirit of cavilling and contention; not seeking for occasions of wrangling and unnecessary disputations, but soberly and impartially searching for the
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the truth, and acquiescing in it when found. In short, we must study the Scriptures with no other aim, no other view, but that of instruction; imploring at the same time the assistance of that Spirit by which they were inspired. Thus they will be read not only with safety, but great benefit; and, by the blessing of God, and our own honest endeavours, *make us wise unto salvation.*

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S E R M O N VI.

The natural Advantages of a virtuous Course
of Life.

PSALM XIX. Part of the 11th Verse.

And in keeping of them there is great reward.

THE rewards annexed to the keeping of God's commandments are either natural or supernatural. I shall confine myself at present to the former; and endeavour to point out those comforts and enjoyments, which, according to the established course of things, virtue does commonly afford men in this life.

To bound and direct our sight in so wide a subject, let it be observed, that the goods
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of life, being all relative either to our souls or bodies, must be entirely comprehended in the enjoyments of sense, and the satisfactions of the mind: in reference to which I shall briefly examine the tendencies and operations of virtue and religion.——The foundation of the former class is *health*, which very much affects also the latter. We know but too well, that, when out of health, we can neither rightly enjoy ourselves, nor any thing about us. In sickness we languish, and in pain we lament; while our senses are blunted, and our faculties disabled. The objects without us court us in vain; and to those within we are not in a condition to attend. But this is a point so plain, that it neither needs proof nor enlargement. Since therefore health is thus essential, whatever tends to its support and security, must undoubtedly be so far valuable. And is not this most evidently the case of a virtuous course of life? Does any man want to be informed that temperance, sobriety, and moderation, directly tend to the preservation of life and health? And is it not most notorious, that intemperance and excess are continually kindling distempers, and undermining men's constitutions? contracting their span, short as it is, and cutting off many years from the thread

thread of life? By indulging the cravings of appetite, and living upon the stretch, men not only shorten, but embitter their days; exposing themselves to many troublesome disorders, and tormenting sensations. Whereas temperance and regularity are not only inoffensive in this respect, but greatly beneficial; not only protecting men's constitutions, and guarding the springs of life; but promoting the freedom and purity of their spirits, and thereby enabling them to act with more alacrity and vigour.

On this foundation then let us proceed, and enquire, whether even men's *sensitive enjoyments* be not really promoted by a virtuous course of life. Such a tendency as this may perhaps be thought by some a disparagement to virtue. But if any are so delicate as to object this, they ought to consider, that whenever virtue improves the pleasures of sense, it refines and purifies them at the same time, by reducing them to the order of nature and reason. It is not the use, but the abuse of sensible goods that makes them dishonourable. In themselves they cannot be reputed base and contemptible, without a reflection on the original Author.—But the sensual man, whose opinion runs into another extreme, wants to be convinced, that virtue

really has such an effect. Pleasure is the very motive which engages and fixes him in his vicious courses ; and he doubts not but he enjoys a greater share of this, whatever other advantages he may forego for the sake of it. But there is good reason to believe, that even in this point he is greatly deceived ; and that if his, and the virtuous man's pleasures, were fairly compared and computed, the balance would turn very much against him. One ground of this supposition is deducible from the foregoing observation : I mean the difference in point of health, and length of days. For in proportion as the voluptuary's life is shortened, or made unhealthy, his pleasure must needs be diminished ; the sum of his enjoyments being both ways lessened ; by the one in quantity, and by the other in quality. —But further, licentious courses not only shorten men's lives, and cause frequent interruptions of pain and sickness ; but, in some measure, disqualify them for those very enjoyments which they so eagerly pursue. All unnatural excesses, all inordinate gratifications, damp men's faculties, dull their senses, and deaden their enjoyments : and in proportion to the degree of their indulgence, their relish always decreases. What is luxury but an unnatural art of stupifying men's taste, and
spoiling

spoiling their appetites? It may multiply and mix objects without measure, and without end; but after all, nature will neither be mocked, nor managed by the capricious rules of fancy and fashion. And whoever attempts it, must lose one way more than they can possibly gain another. Let men tamper with their inclinations, and whet their appetites in the most exorbitant manner; the consequence will be, instead of continued pleasure, frequent disgust; instead of satisfaction, a surfeit. Whereas the plain man, who lives according to nature, both in the choice and the measure of his gratifications, has all the benefit that nature designed him. Hence it is, that his sensations are pure and genuine, and his pleasures quick and lively. He neither wants nor covets the helps of art, and the stimulations of luxury. In short, by immoderate indulgence the appetite sickens, and grows squeamish; catching at every thing, and relishing nothing: but temperance and moderation preserve its natural edge, and thereby heighten every enjoyment.—Again, where is the pleasure of deluging a man's constitution, and drowning his senses, in a flood of intemperance? Thereby converting into an oppressive load, what nature meant for relief and refreshment. Can that be called a pleasure,

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sure, which does violence to a man's whole frame? Which deprives him of the use of his reason and himself, and renders him so justly obnoxious to the scorn and derision of all about him? this the temperate man sees, and pities; and is the more confirmed in his abhorrence of so unmanly a practice. He pretends not to be deaf to the calls of nature, and the just demands of a regular appetite; but makes a wide difference between quenching his thirst, and kindling a flame; between recruiting his spirits, and running riot. And he has not only reason and nature on his side, but even pleasure. Not that spurious pleasure which results from forced appetites, and artificial cravings; but such as always flows from a natural desire duly gratified.—It may be looked upon as a certain truth, that, by plunging men into great excesses, and gross disorders, vice always hinders more enjoyment than it procures. And what it does procure is so clogged and encumbered, that the pleasure is seldom sufficient to balance the trouble. Whereas innocent gratifications are clear, and easy, and free from draw-backs: obtained without trouble, enjoyed without perplexity, and reflected on without remorse.—How wretched a scheme then does the libertine follow! who sacrifices the present peace

peace and comfort of his mind, and all his hopes, pretensions, and prospects hereafter, to that bewitching idol, sensuality; and yet is so far from adding to his share of pleasure, and improving it to the utmost, that he very much lessens, and often destroys it: thereby purchasing, at the highest price in the world, mere loss and disadvantage. So deceitful is sin, and so deluded is the sinner!—On the other hand, though virtue and religion do, in some instances, abridge the pleasures of sense; yet they encrease them in the main, and improve them upon the whole; making men ample amends for all the rules and restraints which they bring upon them. Even self-denial, on certain occasions, at the same time that it answers nobler purposes, promotes this very end, and produces superior gratification.

But it may further be inquired, whether virtue or vice be more effectual in procuring the means of obtaining such enjoyments. Or, in other words, whether is more conducive to the improvement of men's condition and circumstances, and the advancement of their fortunes: a point commonly apprehended of the utmost consequence. In relation hereto it may be objected to the cause of virtue, that it condemns fraud and falsehood, as well as violence and rapine; utterly discouraging all

finister measures, and indirect arts of gain. Now this charge is admitted, and this further concession made, that many fortunes have been improved, and many estates raised, by these means : yet, it is to be hoped, without any disparagement or disadvantage to the cause of virtue. Prosperity and success in this world may be considered as the natural reward of industry, merely as such, and on its own account. But the question is, whether honest industry will not ordinarily go further, and succeed better than dishonest. As to which, whatever convenience, or advantage, men may find, or think they find, in fraud, craft, and circumvention ; yet how light must it weigh against honest measures and upright dealings ? One of the main hinges on which human prosperity turns, and ever will turn, is a fair reputation and a clear character ; in possession of which the fraudulent and unjust man seldom long continues. And when he is once found out, and his character blasted, he must be fortunate indeed, if he do not find himself at a stand ; or if he be able to surmount so great an obstacle to success. Whereas the upright man, if we suppose him to have the same abilities and opportunities, finds his way smooth and open, and *walketh* in it *surely* and successfully.

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His integrity supports him, and his clear reputation carries him through. Every man likes and wishes to deal with him; because they can do it without distrust, without jealousy, without suspicion. Surely then it may be affirmed, that virtuous courses and direct dealings, have a better effect, and contribute more to make men thrive in the world, than all the crooked arts of guile and falsehood.—But supposing it otherwise, there is one sort of success peculiar to virtue, which it never fails to procure, and that is, contentment. For contentment, with a mere competency, is real prosperity. Men are very apt to imagine, that the good things of this world are most unequally divided; and indeed, in some sense, so they are, and ought to be; but we forget how far this difference is balanced by the equality of our nature. If *life entirely consisted in the abundance of possession*, and men's enjoyments were proportionable to their fortunes; then it must be owned, the disparities of this life would be very great. But this is far from being the case. For, not to insist here on the independent goods of the mind, almost equally in every one's power; even the gratifications of the body are not to be had in any such proportion. For however men's fortunes may differ, their sensitive

powers are nearly equal; and beyond these there is no enjoyment. For nature will not be driven out of her course without inconvenience and damage. As her demands are moderate, so her capacities are stinted. And whoever puts them to the stretch in any considerable degree, instead of gaining by it, is sure to suffer. Whatever affluence therefore men may possess, they can only enjoy within those bounds which nature has prescribed. From whence it follows, that there is no such mighty difference between sufficiency and superfluity as is generally imagined. I may add, that the former, with moderate desires, and a contented mind, is greatly preferable to the latter without them.

Having briefly considered the *external* advantages of virtue and religion, I proceed to consider the *internal*, which relate solely to the *mind*. And here it is, in a more especial manner, that virtue reigns and triumphs. Though it tends, as we have seen, to procure men sensitive goods, yet it lays but small stress on them. So far from it, that it rather aims to wean us from them, and turn our thoughts and affections, as much as may be, to the enjoyments of the mind. And however vice may be thought to rival it in the former respect; yet, as to the latter, it has no power,

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no pretensions at all. Its province is sensation ; and that of the worst and meanest sort ; but as to reflection, it is so far from improving or recommending it, that it cannot endure it. On the contrary, religion not only requires it in the strictest manner, but presents the mind with a great variety of the noblest objects, and worthy, above all others, of its contemplation and study. If we have any inclination to think, what more inviting than the perfections and operations of the great Creator ? the multiplicity and majesty of his works ! the dispensations of his providence, and the wonders of his grace ! What a subject for our meditation, the eternal system of his moral law ! which threw the royal Psalmist into such pious raptures, and produced such sublime strains of admiration and devotion, thanksgiving and praise ! or if we extend our thoughts to futurity, and lift them up to that heavenly state, where religion is to glorify and crown her votaries ; what a prospect ! what a scene ! could we but look behind the veil, and turn faith into vision. Joys and glories unspeakable, inconceivable ! Never interrupted, never fading ; but growing and improving through the boundless ages of eternity ! Such ideas, such objects, religion spreads before us, and offers to our
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contemplation. Objects, the least glimpse of which does honour to the mind of man, and might seem to afford it a peculiar satisfaction.

Let it suffice to have barely hinted at the speculative part of religion, that we may sooner turn our thoughts to the practical. And here it may deserve to be considered, whether the discharge of our duty, the *keeping of God's commandments*, be not, in some measure, rewarded here, though chiefly and more abundantly hereafter.—On the government of ourselves, and a regular conduct of our own minds, the enjoyment of life very much depends. Hereby we maintain our tranquillity and our liberty, without which the best of this world's goods are of small value. Fierce appetites, and tumultuous passions, break the peace of the mind every moment, and throw all its powers into disorder and confusion. They urge their demands in a high strain, and every thing is carried on with insolence and clamour. By extravagant terms and concessions perhaps a truce may be gained; but it seldom proves of any continuance; and almost any thing serves to revive these intestine commotions. We are assured *there is no peace to the wicked*; and, by consequence, no true pleasure: but sup-
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posing them in possession of both, how precarious would it be? the least gust of passion, or gale of humour, would sweep them away in an instant. There can be no steadiness, no stability, in a vicious, dissolute mind; which, like a ship without rudder, and without anchor, is continually tossed and driven about; floating at the mercy of every wave that swells, and every wind that blows. On the other hand, virtue produces a calm, serene, and composed state; unshaken by turbulent appetites, and inordinate affections. This tranquility of mind is the natural effect of due government and discipline; which is ever the case where reason sits at the helm, exerting its authority, and keeping the animal powers in just subjection.—Hence arises likewise the secure possession of our moral liberty, and that independence of mind, which is so essentially necessary to a happy state. Undisciplined passions, and irregular desires, are insupportable masters; and no bondage is equal to that of submitting to their rule and government. They engage a man in the basest and most servile employments, expose him to continual disappointments, and involve him in endless vexations. So capricious they are, as never to be satisfied; and so obstinate as to defy all counsel. Hence reason is pronounced
useless,

useless, and wisdom impertinent : and the result is, that the unhappy man is led astray, and dragged backward and forward, till he find himself utterly bewildered in the mazes of sin and folly. On the contrary, a virtuous mind is the seat of order, and the habitation of liberty. There reason and religion preside and govern, and the inferior principles are tame and tractable ; neither making opposition, nor fomenting discord. Hence every thing moves with ease, and the dictates of the understanding are regularly executed. And herein consists the true freedom of the mind, which is the foundation of all enjoyment. Must it not then be a great recommendation of virtue, that it strikes off men's fetters, and delivers them from so cruel and shameful a servitude ? that it brings them out of such perplexity and confusion, and reduces their minds to a state of order, harmony, and concord ? Had they not infinitely better be ruled by reason and conscience, than by mad lusts and brutal appetites ? to be guided by religion is to be governed by him, whose *service is perfect freedom* : whose laws are nothing more than gracious and wise rules for perfecting our natures, and procuring our true happiness. What therefore more suitable, or more desirable, than to conform ourselves

selves cheerfully to his will, and walk in the way of his commandments.

Again, another main branch of our duty is benevolence and charity towards all mankind. And is it needful to shew, that this yields more pleasure, more comfort and complacency, than a contrary disposition? Is any thing to be said or imagined in behalf of envy, hatred, malice, revenge? the very bitterness of life, and the bane of all enjoyment. Even an indifference, a mere want of concern for the welfare of our fellow-creatures, must be an unnatural, insipid, joyless state of mind: as being indeed repugnant to the frame and first principles of human nature. But universal benevolence is a constant source of pure satisfaction, and sincere delight; most pleasing in the exercise, and no less grateful in the remembrance. This is an enjoyment not only worthy of men, and of angels, but of God himself; who is therefore infinitely blessed, because infinitely good. By opening our hearts to the whole creation, we effectually consult our own bliss; a bliss commencing that moment, and enduring for ever. Hereby we secure an interest in every good that befalls, and the *public* prosperity is *ours*. By rejoicing at the happiness of others, we are sure to partake with them; and the more we sympathize, the larger

larger is our share. To be convinced that this good is not imaginary, but real; we need only reflect on domestic benevolence; which nature has inseparably united to self-love. It is easy to conceive, that virtuous affection, when duly improved, will operate in the same way towards the public, that natural affection does towards a man's own household. However they may, at present, differ in degree; though that is not always the case; yet the former is as real as the latter, and the satisfaction resulting from it proportionable. In short, benevolence and public spirit is never barren, never fruitless, in respect of the owner; but always productive of the purest pleasure, and the noblest enjoyment.

But further; the chief branch of our duty remains to be considered, and the great pleasure and consolation arising from it: I mean an habitual reverence and gratitude towards God. An object so transcendent, as never to be thought of, in a proper manner, without pious admiration, and devout astonishment. To admire and adore a Being of infinite perfection, is an employment so natural and reasonable, and so conducive to the honour, and improvement of human nature, that it cannot fail of yielding peculiar satisfaction to all well-dis-

disposed minds. Especially when He is considered, not only as the possessor of all perfection, but as the author and preserver of our beings; as the dispenser of all blessings, and the giver of all good. From him we derive, and to him we are indebted for all our powers, all our enjoyments, and all our hopes: favours and mercies above estimation, and beyond the power of numbers! If then it be, as the Psalmist expresses it, *a joyful and pleasant thing to be thankful*; how much more to such a benefactor! How insensible, how obdurate must the heart of man be, if so great goodness will not warm it, nor so many benefits pierce it? but this is a subject too copious for the conclusion of a discourse. I shall therefore only add at present, that if our love and gratitude towards God bore any proportion to our obligations; virtue and piety would need no praise, religion no advocate.

Would the time have permitted, I should also have observed, what valuable fruits immediately spring up from the practice of virtue; as the pleasing approbation of a man's own mind, and the comfortable gratulations of his conscience; on having answered, in a good measure, the end of his creation, maintained the dignity of his nature, and revered

verenced the image of God imprinted on his soul: I should have considered him as possessed of the esteem of all wise and good men, and doubly entitled to the good-offices of all: and, what is the perfection of all honour, and the crown of true glory, as enjoying the approbation, esteem, and favour of God himself; who is our supreme, unerring Judge, immutably determined by right and truth.—And hence it is, that we derive that principal comfort of life, which lies at the root of all our enjoyments: *viz.* A lively hope, a firm expectation of that future good, that mighty reward, which neither God's perfections nor his promises will suffer us to doubt. This is the great rest and support, the consolation and triumph of all virtuous minds; which softens every pain, and sweetens every pleasure.—If religion dropped men in the grave, and made no provision beyond it; though it would still be much preferable to vice and irreligion, yet it would be infinitely less valuable than it is. Sin and guilt make men afraid of another life; but, excepting this case, who could bear the thoughts of losing his being, and perishing for ever! Short is our span here upon earth; and if it was our all, we could have no great reason to boast. But since

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we are assured of another state; and that other state not only full of bliss and glory, but of endless duration; what can be left us to wish, besides a secure title? And how can we fail of a title, if we obey God, and keep his commandments? This is the indispensable condition of obtaining that great reward. In the mean time, the present advantages of virtue are, we see, by no means contemptible. It is surely no small matter, that it is attended with such real comfort and satisfaction; that it prevents so much evil, and procures so much good: in a word, that *its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.*

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S E R M O N VII.

The supernatural Rewards of Virtue.

PSALM XIX. Part of the 11th Verse.

And in keeping of them there is great Reward.

IN a former discourse on these words, I endeavoured to set forth the natural advantages of virtue and religion; and shall now go on to consider briefly that supernatural reward which God has been pleased to annex to the practice thereof, and the great support and confirmation which they receive from it.—As amiable as virtue is in itself, we need not, we cannot, look upon it as unendowed. What it brings in hand, we have, in some measure, already seen; what it offers in reversion, remains now to be inquired.

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quired. But before we enter upon this, it may be fit to observe, that though this world be not the proper place of retribution, yet even here good men are not destitute of supernatural encouragements. Both temporal and spiritual blessings are conferred upon them, the former frequently, the latter perpetually. Whoever applies himself sincerely to the discharge of his duty, never fails of the consolation and concurrence of God's holy spirit; not only supporting him when in difficulty and distress, but strengthening him in his good resolutions and virtuous undertakings, and leading him on, by various steps and stages, to higher degrees of improvement and perfection.—This is so agreeable to divine goodness and human frailty, that the very heathens themselves, at least the best and wisest of them, were sensible how much it was wanted, and how little was to be done without it. They have expressly declared, that without divine aid, and the succours of Heaven, no man could be a great proficient, or make any extraordinary advances in wisdom and virtue.—What they discovered by reason, is confirmed and ascertained to us by revelation; which represents us as *temples* and *habitations* of God's holy spirit, and assures us of the continuance
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and protection of this heavenly guest, provided we rebel not against him, and drive him not away by sin and disobedience. And is it not a singular encouragement amidst the infirmities and corruptions of mankind, that whenever they seriously endeavour to do well, they shall be sure to succeed? That, if they be not wanting to themselves, they shall never fail of sufficient help and strength to conquer temptations, and surmount those difficulties which rise in their way? In a word, that it is always put into their power to improve their own minds, to grow continually in grace and goodness, and press forward towards perfection?

But from the consideration of the means, let us proceed to that of the end itself; *viz.* that *high prize of our calling*, that *heavenly inheritance*, that *crown of life*, which, through the merits of *Christ*, is provided for the faithful: a reward no less than that of endless glory and felicity. But what felicity, and what glory? Where shall we find words to express, or thoughts to apprehend, that immense good, which is signified by heaven, and set forth by a blessed immortality? A good so far above our present capacities and conceptions, that the scripture is forced to represent it to us in emblems and figures;

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and whenever it speaks literally, to give us only negative descriptions of it. Thus we are told, that *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* We have no powers, no faculties at present, able to reach that sublimity of happiness, which the righteous will enjoy in another world. We must have new ideas, and new capacities, before we can even apprehend them. As soon might young children understand the satisfactions of a manly age, as mortal men be able to explain, or even conceive, those joys which belong to a blessed immortality. For indeed our present state, according to the Apostle's allusion, is but mere childhood, in comparison of that which is to come. In many respects we are forced to act and think like children; nor will it be in our power entirely to *put away childish things*, till we arrive at that maturity of condition, that manly, or rather angelic state, where *the spirits of just men shall be made perfect.* We shall then look back at the vanities, and shadows, and toys of this life, with great contempt; and wonder how they were ever able to give us the least entertainment.

But to proceed; though we are thus at a
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loss in our conceptions of that future reward, that heavenly state which we are considering; yet nevertheless such general notices are given us of it, as merit our best attention, and highest regard. In the first place, we are assured, that whatever is troublesome or grievous to us here below, will find no place above, but be excluded for ever. We shall there be secured from all evil, and fixed out of the reach of all adversity. God will *wipe away all tears from our eyes*, and all sorrows from our hearts. Those pains and griefs, which disquiet and disturb us so much here, will there be neither felt, nor feared. In every sense we shall find ourselves above the region of storms and tempests; and our minds established in perfect peace, and perpetual serenity. This is the foundation of our expected bliss, whatever may be built upon it; and thus far our apprehensions are just and clear.—But when we proceed to the contemplation of those joys and pleasures which *flow at God's right hand*, and make up the blessedness of the righteous; then it is that our ideas fail us, and our conceptions fall short. We neither know how far our present faculties will be enlarged, nor what new ones will be given us; much less can we tell what kinds and varieties of objects

will be provided to answer them. We can only say in general, that our understandings will be employed, our wills exercised, and our affections gratified in the noblest manner. In this life we can only *see*, as it were, *through a glass darkly*; and our best intellectual helps are only glimmerings of light and knowledge. We find ourselves very much incumbered in our search after truth; ever subject to errors and misapprehensions; and, at the best, our discoveries are but small, and superficial. But hereafter we shall neither be confined nor bewildered in our pursuits. At the same time that we are privileged from error, a boundless prospect will lie open before us. The works of nature, the wonders of providence, and the glories of the universe will be exhibited to our minds, and eternally surveyed with delight and astonishment: such scenes of wisdom, such treasures of truth, as can never be exhausted by any finite faculties, or in any finite duration.—In like manner our wills and affections will be exercised and fixed on the worthiest objects, and the supreme good. For it must ever be remembered, that all true happiness, even that of heaven itself, is necessarily grafted on virtue and moral goodness. Gratitude and piety towards God,
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and universal benevolence towards our fellow creatures, are not only indispensable conditions of obtaining heaven ; but likewise in themselves, and in their own nature, productive of the purest delights, sublimest joys, and most divine satisfactions. Virtuous minds will there be gratified in the fullest manner ; and their happiness be commensurate to their goodness. What unspeakable pleasure must be raised in hearts truly grateful and benevolent, to find such an immensity of good poured out on the whole society of the righteous ! To see numberless myriads of beings partaking of the same bliss, and crowned with the same glory ; all linked together in the bonds of mutual affection, and undissembled good-will ; and unanimously joining in the praise and adoration of their common Patron, and almighty Benefactor ! What an addition must this be to the blessedness of every individual ! Happy in himself, and happy by rebound ! Who is so far from envying others, or being envied by them, that every participation, every private share, adds to the public stock, and augments the general bliss. Where the good enjoyed is so far from being diminished by the number of the participants, that it is raised by it, and increased to the highest degree.

degree. For such is the nature of all virtuous felicity, and can be no otherwise. God himself is therefore supremely blessed, because he is supremely benevolent and kind, and delights in the prosperity of his creatures; communicating to all liberally, and filling a whole universe with the fruits of his bounty. In proportion to the happiness of the creatures, the Creator's goodness will appear, who has rendered them capable of such enjoyments, advanced them to such dignities, and crowned them with his favour and loving kindness. It is not possible to express or imagine the blessed state of such a society, under such a head; a society knit together by all the bands of duty and affection, and wherein there is no other strife, no other contention, but that of excelling in gratitude towards God, and benevolence towards each other: a society governed by him whose will is the law of kindness, whose precepts are all favours, and his commands mercies and blessings.—Such are the powers and perfections of the Deity, and such the effects of both, as to employ the minds of his intelligent creatures, and exercise their admiration to all eternity. This infinite and unfathomable subject will last as long as duration itself, nor can endless ages exhaust
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it. New scenes will be continually opened, and fresh contemplations offered, without end. The mind may travel on from glory to glory, from perfection to perfection, with unwearied desire and perpetual inclination, and never arrive at any period. And this circumstance it is which completes the happiness of the heavenly state. For since it admits of no satiety, no weariness, no indifference; since, on the contrary, its joys and pleasures are ever growing, increasing, and multiplying; the very thoughts of a limited existence would not only be uncomfortable, but dreadful. Whereas to be conscious and assured, that the good possessed is both boundless and endless, cannot fail of perfecting the state, and consummating its bliss.—Will then an eternity of life and happiness be granted to the righteous? Is an everlasting habitation in the heavens, with all that is great, and all that is good, provided and reserved for such creatures as we are? How can we forbear imitating the sentiment and expression of the pious Psalmist? *Lord, what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him; or the son of man, that thou thus rewardest him!* rewardest him in a manner that he is not able to comprehend or conceive, nor even to think of at all without wonder and amazement?—

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In short, whatever things are amiable ; whatever things are excellent ; whatever things are capable of pleasing our souls, and charming our affections ; whatever things are fit for God to give, and possible for man to receive ; whatever things conduce either to his happiness, perfection, or glory, will certainly be contained and found in the reward of a blessed immortality !—This in general may be said securely, and intelligibly ; however dark and deficient we may be in our accounts of particulars. Though it be altogether in vain to attempt a just representation of the happiness of heaven : yet this we know, and here we may rest ; that it will be large beyond our utmost wishes, and lasting as our immortal souls.——I shall now go on to consider briefly, as I proposed, in the

Second place, how useful, or rather necessary, this future and supernatural reward is for the support of virtue and religion in this present world.——I do not mean, that our obligations thereto are derived solely or chiefly from such a motive or founded upon it. The true ground of pure morality, and undefiled religion, is the intrinsic reasonableness of the things themselves, and the essential worth and excellence of those duties which
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are contained in them, and prescribed by them. Gratitude and piety towards God, justice and mercy towards men, are things absolutely, and in their own nature, lovely and good; worthy to be chosen, and fit to be practised, at all times, and by all rational beings, independently of all rewards whatsoever. We ought, in reason and conscience, to do that which is right, whether it promote our interest, or not; to endeavour to please God, and submit to his will, whether a recompense be offered us, or no. The relation wherein we stand to our supreme Lord, and the benefits we have received from Him, oblige us to be dutiful and obedient; and whenever we fail to be so, we are, and must be, self-condemned; as violating the eternal laws of order, reason, and truth. This, I say, is really our case; and would be so, supposing we had no promise or prospect at all of any future reward.—But nevertheless it must be owned, nor can it be disowned, that such a reward is highly requisite for the support and encouragement of virtue and religion among mankind. For the obligations above-mentioned, whatever they may be in themselves, are not in fact strong enough to hold such creatures as men; who, besides the frailties and corruptions of their nature, are so framed

framed and circumstanced, as to be invincibly attached to their own interest. And though it may be said, and has been already shewn, that virtue is naturally advantageous and beneficial; and for the most part brings a present reward along with it: yet it often happens, and often must happen in their present condition, not only that virtuous men are sufferers, but even sufferers by their virtue: they have not only forfeited hereby many advantages of life, but life itself. And is it not absolutely necessary that such irregular events should be adjusted and rectified hereafter? Were mankind universally reasonable and righteous, they would all certainly and constantly find their account in virtue, even in this world. But since many men are unreasonable and vicious, enemies to God and goodness; since they oftentimes want neither power nor will to afflict, persecute, and distress the righteous; it is manifest that virtue stands in need of other supports and encouragements than what it brings along with it. Fortified with the hopes and expectations of a blessed immortality, a good conscience may and will support men under the sharpest misfortunes, and even the severest storms of persecution. But if there was to be no reward for the righteous, no recompense

pense in another life; the cause of virtue, in all such circumstances, must inevitably sink and fall to the ground. For if it exposed men to great hardships in this world, and yet could make them no amends in another; every one sees that it would lie under the greatest disadvantage. Instead of being encouraged to do well, men would be discouraged; instead of being drawn to their duty, they would be deterred from it; instead of being smitten with the charms of virtue and *the beauty of holiness*, they would view it in a most dismal light, and consider it as an object dangerous and dreadful. It is not to be expected, that any man should be content to suffer great trials and grievous tribulations here, without any consideration, any equivalent hereafter. And from hence it follows, that a future state of retribution is, in such cases and circumstances, absolutely necessary for the security of virtue, and the support of religion.

But setting aside the case of persecution, there would still be great occasion for the sanctions of religion; neither could it be upheld and maintained without them. Even in the common adversities of life we stand in great need of such a support. Take away all hopes of futurity and it will be in the power
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of ordinary calamities to bear down our virtue, and us with it. That patience, that firmness of mind, that entire submission to the will of God, which religion requires of us in the day of adversity, would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, on such a supposition. *The spirit of a man* would be very ill able to *sustain his infirmities*, or bear up against misfortunes. Were he deprived of all hopes of future good, all expectations hereafter; what power, what principle, would be left in his mind, to arm it against adversity, and strengthen it under sufferings? To be miserable in this world, and nothing in the next; which is the case we are speaking of; would be a condition above all the powers of human patience: nor could it be reflected on without plunging men into the depths of sorrow and despair. The natural advantages of virtue, great as they are, yet what could they avail to a man surrounded with troubles and misfortunes, and yet at the same time destitute of hope, and conscious of the near approach of utter extinction? Such a total loss of being might indeed be some consolation to those who have made themselves wretched by vice and wickedness; but surely it would be poor comfort for the righteous, and sad encouragement for innocence and virtue.

virtue.——Whereas, if we consider the case in fact, and behold virtue supported by a divine promise of the greatest and most glorious rewards ; rewards infinite in value, and endless in duration ; then it must be allowed, that men neither want consolation nor encouragement. Such an assurance as this is abundantly sufficient to quiet their minds, and animate them to persist in their duty, whatever crosses and calamities they may meet with in this present state. When a man can look through the evils of life, and see a blessed immortality beyond them ; he is so far from having just cause to sit down and despond, that he has great reason to proceed with patience and resolution, and even cheerfulness and alacrity.

But further ; as future rewards are thus necessary to support virtue in distress, and encourage good men in adversity ; so they are likewise of great service even in the day of prosperity. For here too are many trials, though of a different kind, and a great variety of temptations. In the other case, virtue is exposed to the assaults of trouble, and the batteries of misfortune ; but here the danger is of its being undermined : nor is that danger lessened by the imperceptible advances of the enemy. A state of prosperity is very apt to

soften the mind, and subdue the heart ; and, by consequence, to betray men's innocence, and break in upon their integrity. Amidst the pomps and pleasures of life, and the noise and hurry of secular enjoyments, the still voice of reason and wisdom is too often badly heard, and worse regarded. The avenues of sense are all open ; while those of the understanding are in a great measure shut. Various allurements lay siege to the heart, and gain ground upon the affections. And whatever ground sensuality gains, virtue must lose. In short, the prosperous man ever walks in the midst of snares, and is surrounded with temptations. And were it not for the checks of religion, and the hopes and fears of a future state, he would still more easily be led astray, and swim down the stream of concupiscence and pleasure. This is too often the case, notwithstanding the promises and prospects of futurity ; and would certainly be so much oftener without them. However, such motives are evidently of great use and advantage to the cause of virtue ; as they are a counter-bias to the propensities of corrupt nature, and greatly contribute to fix the mind, and balance the temptations of sin and sense.

Having thus briefly considered the rewards of virtue, both natural and supernatural,

tural, and shewn how much it is indebted to the latter for its security and support; the result of the whole matter, and the chief use to be made of the doctrine, is this: our obligations and excitements to well-doing are so numerous and strong, that we must be utterly inexcusable in the sight of God, and our own consciences, if we stand out against them. Would we act worthily and wisely, and govern ourselves by the rules of right reason, as becomes all intelligent beings, we must be virtuous: for virtue is the highest reason, and the perfection of all wisdom. Do we acknowledge the obligations of gratitude, and are we content to be drawn by the gentle cords of goodness and mercy, beneficence and love? We must be religious; for religion is the truest gratitude to our best Friend and supreme Benefactor. To disobey his will, and transgress his laws, is not only impiety and rebellion, but the vilest and basest ingratitude in the whole world.—However, if we can be so unreasonable and perverse, as to break these bonds in sunder; yet can we be also false to our own interest, and traitors to ourselves? If we cannot, or will not see the charms of virtue; yet can we be blind to our own welfare? If we refuse to hearken to the precepts of religion; yet shall we not hear the calls of nature, the voice of self-love, and the

dictates of common sense? Though truth and righteousness, gratitude and piety, be not able to take hold of our hard hearts; yet surely interest might prevail. An interest of what kind? Not a low, mean, transient advantage; not a benefit for days, months, or years; but a pearl of such price, a good of such value, and such extent, as are above the reach of human calculation, and beyond all the power of numbers! In a word, a good of infinite worth, and eternal duration. Here then let us fix, consider, and weigh. Let us put into one scale the enjoyments of sin, and the pleasures of sensuality; and into the other the rewards of religion, and the joys of heaven: if, at first sight, the former do not appear *lighter than vanity itself*; and the latter do not prove a most *exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, let us determine accordingly, and choose which we please. But if we find, as we needs must, that this is really the case, let us think at first, as we must think at last; and, to conclude, let us not run into such extreme folly and madness, as to despise the goodness and mercy of God. For how shall we answer it either to him, or to ourselves; how shall we escape the indignation of Heaven, and the fury of our own consciences, if we reject such gracious offers, and neglect so great salvation?

S E R-

S E R M O N VIII.

Of Self-Examination,

2 COR. XIII. Part of the 5th Verse.

— *Prove your own selves :* —

IN the pilgrimage of human life, as the *Scripture* most fitly represents our present state, there are two general points incumbent on us, of universal concern, and the utmost consequence ; the one is, that we truly and sincerely endeavour to find out the right way ; and the other, that, when found, we walk therein with perseverance, fidelity, and probity, to our lives end. Hereon depends, in a great measure, our welfare in this life, and entirely our success in the next. Most highly therefore it concerns us, if we have

any regard for the peace and prosperity of our own minds, to *examine* and *prove ourselves* in both these respects. This we are obliged to by all the ties of duty and interest; and it is absolutely necessary for our security and satisfaction. Accordingly the Scripture frequently exhorts us to such a self-examination, and encourages us thereto by assurances of great comfort and tranquillity arising from it. We are required to *examine ourselves*, concerning our *faith*, and more especially concerning our *works*: to search and *prove* the principles that we maintain, and the practices we follow: that if, upon a fair enquiry, we shall appear to ourselves to have *believed*, embraced, and *obeyed the truth*, to the best of our power, we may reap the fruits of that comfortable discovery, and partake of that spiritual joy, that *rejoicing in ourselves*, which the apostle declares to be the natural consequence of our so doing.—In discoursing on this subject I shall inquire,

First, Into the practicableness of the precept here laid down. And,

Secondly, What obligations we lie under to

to observe it duly, and diligently, in both the respects above-mentioned.

First, I am to inquire into the practicableness of the precept here laid down.——For if, on any account, it is not in our power to *prove ourselves*, and that effectually; in vain are all arguments and exhortations relating to it. By doing it effectually, I mean doing it in such a manner as to arrive at a clear knowledge, and a competent satisfaction concerning the state and situation of our own minds. This then I shall briefly endeavour to make out, both in respect of our *faith* and *practice*; of our principles and persuasions, and the tenor of our lives and conversations.—Concerning the former it may be alleged, that it seems very difficult, if not impossible, for any man to discover certainly, in respect of his religious principles and opinions, whether he be, or be not, in the possession of the truth. Whatever assurance he may find concerning the great fundamentals of religion; yet in respect of other doctrines, which are very various, as well as numerous, it may be said, that no absolute certainty is to be obtained, or expected. That even Christians may, in

many points, misjudge, and fall into error, notwithstanding all the care and conduct they can use ; and however they may *prove themselves*, however examine the proceedings of their own minds, not be able to rectify those errors, or even discover them. How then are their sentiments and principles to be proved, in conformity to the direction given in my text?——To which I answer, that the self-examination here spoken of, does not depend on the result of our inquiries, and the success of our speculations. Without question all men are liable to error, whatever care and pains they may take to prevent it. However they may guard and conduct their understandings, they will very often fail, and fall short of the truth. False doctrines and erroneous principles will frequently prevail in this dark and imperfect state. But what then? Since infallibility is not in our power, it cannot be our duty. And therefore those errors, which are involuntary and invincible, can never be criminal. Though we may not be able to exempt ourselves from mistakes, yet we may use our endeavours to avoid them. Whatever mistakes we may fall into, yet it is always in our power to inquire and judge fairly and uprightly. If we cannot be infallible,

lible, yet we may be honest; and what is wanting in truth, may be made up in sincerity. *God knoweth our frame, and remembereth our infirmities.* He allows, without doubt, for the narrowness of our minds, and the shortness of our faculties. He never expects to *reap where he has not sown*, nor requires beyond *what he has given*. The grand proof therefore demanded of us, in respect of our faith and the principles of our religion, is not the rectitude of our judgments, but an unfeigned love of truth, and a careful and impartial pursuit of it. We are to examine ourselves whether we have exercised our minds, and exerted our understandings, in proportion to the talents and opportunities which God has given us: whether we have heartily and vigorously endeavoured to inform ourselves aright concerning the doctrines of right reason, and the great truth of religion: whether we have laboured to correct or prevent every false bias, and to remove those prejudices which are so apt to mislead us: uninfluenced by vanity, by authority, by interest; and directed in our searches and inquiries by evidence alone. This may be, and in a great measure is, required at our hands, frail and imperfect as we are. And accordingly, the heads of our self-examination, in relation

tion to the doctrinals of religion, must be of this or the like nature. 'Tis very often not in our power, and therefore we cannot be obliged to find out how far we are in the right, and how far in the wrong; for such a discovery as this, we may easily want either capacity or opportunity: but an upright mind and an honest heart are always in our power, and therefore always required.

But here perhaps a question may arise, whether this test may not also be insufficient, and this proof fallacious. It has been indeed doubted, and even disputed, concerning their religious principles and persuasions, whether men be able to arrive at any just assurance even of their own sincerity. It has been alleged, that their prejudices are so numerous and strong, and yet so close and concealed, that their minds may easily be misled, and their judgments imperceptibly corrupted: that, through the power of self-delusion, men may fancy themselves very upright in their inquiries, and impartial in their determinations, and yet in reality be quite otherwise.—In answer hereto, it may and must be granted, that this is, in fact, too often the case. We are certainly very dexterous in deluding and imposing upon ourselves, and often lay claim to sincerity on the weakest grounds, and
slightest

slightest pretensions. But this affects not the point before us ; nor can any thing be concluded from it to the disadvantage of what has been here urged. The question is not, whether men may deceive themselves ? for that is confessed ; but whether it be out of their power to prevent such a deception ? And this, in general, may securely be denied. Though we cannot, in every case, discover exactly whether we have taken due care and pains, and done what lies in our power, to inform ourselves aright, and divest ourselves of all prejudice ; yet, in the main, we may certainly perceive, whether we have proceeded in our inquiries, with that care and fidelity which may reasonably be expected from us. Though we can never pretend to lay open all the folds and recesses of our hearts, or to understand the state of our minds, and the measures of our conduct, precisely and minutely in every particular ; yet, nevertheless, if we be not wanting to ourselves, we may plainly discern, whether we have been governed by a love of truth, or by-views, and sinister affections ; whether we have sincerely endeavoured to form our judgments according to evidence, or suffered them to follow the dictates of interest, or the bias of education. Of this, for the
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most part, we cannot be ignorant, without our own fault. If we turn our eyes inward, and fairly examine what passes within our own breast, we shall not fail to discover on what foundation our principles and professions are built. To suppose otherwise, is to suppose our faculties insufficient to answer the ends for which they were given us. It is to suppose our minds in the dark, and that inevitably, in respect of their own most important operations; and that we are neither capable of knowing the measure of them, nor able to find out the springs and motives by which they are produced. There is so wide a difference between care and neglect, sincerity and guile, probity and partiality, that whoever examines himself as he ought, must and will be conscious, in the main, how his case stands in that respect we are speaking of. And indeed if this be not allowed, no Christian can have any assurance of rendering himself an acceptable believer. For supposing him possessed of the truth, though it must often happen otherwise; yet this cannot recommend him, if he obtained it by chance, and not by a due and careful use of his faculties. And if this be a point undiscoverable, and out of his reach; the consequence is, that he must unavoidably remain

in great uncertainty and anxiety to his life's end. In short, the whole merit of our faith, as far as we are concerned in it, depends on a diligent and upright exercise of our faculties; and if we cannot tell when we exercise them in this manner, and when not, our hopes of acceptance and success are, and must be, the most precarious things in the world.—I conclude therefore, that we may *prove ourselves*, concerning this part of our duty to good purpose, and with sufficient effect, if such means as are in our power be not neglected.

And if we are thus capable of proving ourselves in respect to our *belief*, we are still more so in respect of our *practice*; forasmuch as our actions are, for the most part, clearer and more manifest than our judgments. In some particulars of a nice and dubious nature, we may perhaps be at a loss to determine whether we have done well or ill; but as to the main of our duty, and the general course and tenor of our actions, every man may easily see into the state of his own case, unless he wilfully shut his eyes. For the rule is plain, and the application ready. Whether and how far we have hearkened to the dictates of reason, and the precepts of revelation, we cannot well be ignorant, unless we be unwilling to know. For right and wrong, innocence

nocence and guilt, are as different as light and darkness. In like manner, when we have departed from our duty, and transgressed the laws of Heaven, we may soon discover whether we have, in good earnest, repented and reformed; and what endeavours we have used to resist sin, and subdue temptation: whether we have renounced every known vice, and given up even our darling habits; striving sincerely to *purify our hearts*, and to *perfect holiness in the fear of God*. The knowledge of these things we shall certainly obtain, if we look into our minds and manners, and examine ourselves as we ought. Were it otherwise, our faculties would fail us in the highest concern we have, and conscience itself be a word without a meaning. I say *conscience*, that faithful *witness* which the Apostle speaks of, and to whose impartial *testimony* he refers men upon all occasions. Without question we may, and often do, deceive ourselves about our spiritual condition and circumstances; but then it is because we have a mind to be deceived. If we search within, and sincerely seek the truth of our case, we shall certainly find it. Our consciences, if not quite corrupted, will give a just and faithful report; either *accusing* or *excusing*, as facts will allow.

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They will neither delude nor disappoint us, unless we stifle their evidence, or wilfully falsify their information.—But do we not find in Scripture, that *the heart is deceitful above all things—who can know it?* Thus we read, and the answer is plain. As God perfectly knows our hearts; so we may, in a great measure, know them ourselves, if we desire and endeavour it. But every man's heart is dark and impenetrable to the rest of mankind; which is plainly the meaning of the words here cited. They do not import self-imposition, or unconsciouness; but only that our thoughts and designs are concealed and covered from the inspection of other men; who easily may be, and very often are, quite mistaken in the judgments they form of one another's proceedings. That *deceitfulness* of man's *heart* which is here spoken of, however it may obstruct or affect our inquiries abroad, needs to be no bar, unless we make it such, to self-examination.—In short, though we may deceive ourselves, as well as others; yet the former is generally owing to wilfulness, or gross neglect. This is evident from Scripture, and experience abundantly confirms it.—Having thus endeavoured to shew the practicableness of the duty enjoined in my text, I proceed, in the

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Second place, to consider briefly the obligations we lie under to observe and fulfil it. The grounds and reasons of *proving ourselves* are plainly these, viz. that if we are able to make a satisfactory account, and find *the answer of a good conscience*, we may reap the comfort of such a discovery, and enjoy that peace and composure of mind which naturally results from it: and, on the other hand, if our thoughts and memories testify against us, and our consciences plead guilty, that we may forthwith turn from the evil of our ways, and thereby escape the dreadful consequences of sin and guilt. Since all our hopes and successes hereafter depend on our conduct here, as I before observed, and we know to be true; what can possibly more concern us, than to examine and learn what our case is, and how our accounts stand?—

If we discover, upon a fair inquiry, that we have acted, or endeavoured to act, worthily and wisely; that we have been mindful of the dignity of our nature, and studious of the divine will; that we have been lovers of truth and righteousness, and sought them carefully with a patient mind, and a pure heart; walking before God *in simplicity and sincerity*, and striving to improve and cultivate those talents which he has committed to our charge; if,

I say,

I say, such a discovery as this should be the result of our self-examination, can any thing possibly turn to better account ? Can any review, any reflection in the world, afford us truer contentment, more solid comfort, more durable satisfaction ? Nay, will not this be a fund of the purest, sublimest, and most exquisite pleasure that we are now capable of ? To obtain the approbation of our own minds, and the absolution of our consciences ; to find and feel tranquillity in our breasts, and serenity in our thoughts ; subjection in our wills, and conviction in our understandings ; good order, concord, harmony in our affections and inclinations ; is, at least, the noblest foundation for happiness that can be conceived or imagined. To this must be added, a consciousness of God's approbation, which is the perfection of all glory, and a sense of his favour and loving kindness, the fountain of all our hopes : and, in consequence hereof, a well grounded prospect of that blessed immortality, those joys and glories which God has provided for, and promised his faithful servants. Are not then such hopes, such prospects, such privileges, worthy to be sought and discovered ? If, by the goodness of God, we are entitled thereto, is it not of great moment to the comfort and prosperity of our lives to be

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apprized of such a blessing? The Scripture expressly informs us, that *if our consciences condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.* But how is this to be understood? *Condemn us* they must in various respects. For *in many things we offend all.* But, though we cannot pretend to unsinning obedience, or perfect innocence; yet we may have complied with the gracious terms of the Gospel, and obtained acceptance by the sincerity of our endeavours, and the succours of repentance. And if even this be our case, the knowledge of it must yield us unspeakable consolation, support us in every condition, and cheer us powerfully under all events.— Besides, the *proving ourselves* will enable us to discover our defects; for defects there always are, and always will be, in this life: and these must necessarily be discovered, in order to be supplied. Hence we gain an opportunity of making continually further improvements; of growing in grace and virtue, and reaching forwards towards perfection. So beneficial, as well as comfortable, are the good man's reviews, and the progress he makes in the knowledge of himself.

On the other hand, if, upon searching into the state of our own minds, we find our case to be bad; if it appears that we have habitually

tually *done amiss*, and *dealt wickedly*; that we have obstinately rebelled against the divine authority, and been regardless of right and truth; that *our transgressions are multiplied before God*, and *our sins*, presumptuous and unrepented sins, *testify against us*; such a proof, such a discovery, sad and melancholy as it is, is infinitely better than darkness, and blindness, and hard-hearted stupidity; as it affords us an opportunity that we so much want, and whereon so much depends. It is absolutely necessary that we look into our spiritual accounts, however they may prove. Neglecting this we must be undone, without relief, and without remedy. There can be no hope, no possibility of escaping. For the ruin of impenitent sinners is manifest and inevitable.——It must indeed be confessed, that the reviews and retrospects of a wicked man are, and must be, very irksome and ungrateful. Whenever he turns his eyes within his own breast, he meets with objects disagreeable, deformed, ghastly; and instead of *soundness*, *wounds*, *bruises*, and *putrifying sores*. But, whatever uneasiness it may give him, this is so far from being a reason why he should not look there, that it is the strongest reason in the world why he should. Had he not much better endure the sight and search-

ing of those wounds, than suffer them to go on till they prove mortal? And is not the smart of a wounded conscience infinitely preferable to a mortification? If he cannot now bear those images of guilt which his mind and memory present him with, how will he bear them hereafter? If to survey them for a few hours give him so much disturbance, what will he say or think, when he finds that they accompany him into another world, and without intermission haunt him for ever! Let him wink at present as he may, and overlook them as he can; they will then continually stand before his eyes, and stare him in the face, to his eternal confusion. That trouble and concern which they might now give him to good purpose, if he endeavoured a cure, will then be turned, without any such prospect, into remorse, and anguish, and horror unspeakable. In short, those sins and crimes, which the sinner now feels to be such troublesome guests, will hereafter be transformed into fiends and furies, and inflict stripes and sorrows beyond all conception. — So highly then does it behove men, involved deeply in sin and guilt, to *commune with their own hearts*, and *search their spirits*, in order to an immediate cure, and an effectual reformation. If the goodness of God do

not lead men to repentance, yet surely they might stand in awe of his vengeance. Can any rational creature bear to live under his Maker's displeasure? Or if he can live thus, yet can he bear to die in so dreadful a circumstance! When, through the course of a dissolute life, he has insulted God's authority, violated his laws, and profaned his image; is it not high time to stop, and to think of some reparation, before death and judgment overtake him? Has he the confidence to venture quite through, and appear before the divine tribunal in so wretched a plight? Dare he think of launching into the ocean of eternity with such a weight of sin, and such a load of guilt? To act in so desperate a manner, looks as if a man was his own professed enemy, and had devoted himself to endless destruction.

Upon the whole, whatever a man's condition be, nothing can be more just, nothing more important, than the precept in my text. If he is ignorant of himself, no other knowledge can make him amends, or stand him in much stead. And yet, alas! such is our folly, that we are better acquainted with almost any thing than with ourselves. Intelligence abroad we seldom want, and in that respect are curious and quick-sighted more than enough;

while at the same time we take little or no notice of what passes within our own breasts. If this be owing to a public spirit, certainly it is of a wrong sort. For without question the true way of remedying disorders, and reforming the world, is for every man to undertake himself.—To the Apostle's precept let us add his example, and, in conformity to both, let it be our continual business to *take heed unto ourselves*, and *herein*, above all things, to *employ and exercise ourselves*, that *we may have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man*.

S E R M O N IX.

Of Diligence in our temporal Concerns.

ROM. XII. Former part of the 11th Verse.

Not slothful in business.

EVERY man has two general concerns upon his hands of great weight and moment, answerable to the two kinds of existence through which he is to pass. Namely, the present life, and that which is to come: for both which, it is incumbent on him to make suitable provision. The one is indeed of much greater importance than the other, and therefore merits a proportionable share of his endeavours. The affair of the next life, or the business of eternity, is of infinite consequence, and requires our utmost diligence

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and care. Nevertheless the concerns of this world are by no means to be neglected. A due attendance upon these is not inconsistent with the prosecution of the other; but, on the contrary, tends to further and promote it. Worldly industry, under proper restraints and regulations, is a great friend to religion and virtue; as I shall have occasion to observe more at large in the progress of this discourse. For which reason it cannot be a subject unworthy of our consideration. And indeed the caution in my text relates wholly to it; the meaning of which is, that men must by no means give themselves up to idleness or sloth; but must diligently pursue their respective vocations, and be industrious in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call them.

I shall not offer, upon this subject, to mark out the bounds and limits of industry, or to shew precisely to what measure and degree men are to be diligent in their several ways of life. That is not perhaps possible to be done, considering men's different circumstances and conditions, which require different degrees of industry and labour. Some are obliged to take more pains, and to be more laborious than others; whose condition of life exempts them from so great a degree of toil, by making it
neither

neither necessary nor expedient. However, idleness is the privilege of none: it is criminal in all, and prejudicial to all, in many respects. But of this more hereafter. In the mean time it must be observed, that worldly industry is capable of being carried to excess, not only as it may become detrimental to health, which is comparatively but a small consideration; but as it may intrench upon the concerns of the other life: which being, as I took notice before, of far the greatest moment, must in no wise be broken in upon by any concerns belonging to this.

Thus then our application to worldly business must be limited and confined. We must *make our spiritual calling and election sure*, whatever become of our temporal callings. But to shew more particularly how far men ought to be diligent and industrious in their respective employments, is neither possible nor needful. Every one may know how to apply the general precept to his own case and circumstances. If a man is but convinced, that he ought to be industrious, and is thereupon resolved so to be, he will discover readily enough how to proportion his industry to his condition and state of life. I shall content myself therefore with endeavouring to persuade men to comply in general with the
caution

caution in my text, by shewing the necessity of industry, and the several advantages which belong to it.

In order to which it must be considered, that the world cannot subsist without labour and pains. Some indeed may be excused, and ever will be exempted from the drudging part of business; but still even these cannot be wholly idle and unemployed without damage to the public, as well as disadvantage to themselves. However, the generality of mankind must labour. The necessities of life require a great deal of pains, and the comforts and conveniences of it require much more. God could indeed, if he had so pleased, have maintained the world without men's labour: he could have made such provision for them, as would have supplied all their wants, and furnished all their occasions, without any contribution of their endeavours. The earth might have been made to have yielded its increase of its own accord, and have poured out its fruits without any human care or cultivation. Every climate might have abounded with whatever could be desired for use or ornament, without any dependance on others. In a word, nature might have been made so rich and fruitful in every respect, as to have rendered art useless, and labour superfluous. But Providence
was

was pleased to order matters otherwise; and we may be sure upon very weighty and important accounts. Considering the corruptions of human nature, such a state of ease and of freedom from employment might have been fatal. Had man indeed continued innocent and pure as he was created, there would not have been that necessity for labour which there is at present. Accordingly our first parents were exempted before the fall. While they remained in Paradise, they were provided with every thing purely by the bounty of nature. The willing earth produced, without care or culture, whatever could administer to use or delight. But this privilege they lost, when they lost their innocence, and, by incurring guilt, they subjected themselves to labour. It was part of *Adam's* curse, that he should *eat bread in the sweat of his face*: which obligation devolved in course upon his guilty posterity. It appears indeed from hence, that human labour has but an ignoble original. But then, this makes nothing for the credit of idleness. For had man continued innocent, though he would not have been condemned to labour; yet he would have been far from living in sloth. His active nature would not have suffered him to have been unemployed, nor would employment have been wanting. But then,

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then it would have been of a finer and nobler kind, than that which a great part of men's endeavours are taken up with at present. The works of the creation, and the unsearchable nature and perfections of the Creator, would have found abundant exercise for the faculties of his mind. And there would then have been both more leisure, and more inclination, as well as greater capacity, for so sublime an employment. So that the punishment of the above-mentioned curse consisted in the exchange of business, as it may be called; the exercise of the mind, for the labour of the body. Not that the former has wholly ceased, but that it is very much encroached upon by the latter. And, in the present circumstances of mankind, it is very necessary that it should be so, both in a natural and a moral respect. Labour is, we see, necessary in a natural sense; because, since man's expulsion out of Paradise, nature calls for his endeavours, and will not furnish him upon any other terms, with such of her blessings, as he most stands in need of. And, in a moral respect, labour is, in a great measure, necessary to keep him out of worse employment. In his present corrupt state, had he not worldly business to engage a good part of his thoughts, he would be very apt to let them run out upon what was unlawful. He
has,

has such a great averſion to what is good, and ſuch a ſtrong propenſity to what is evil, that it is neceſſary for him to be frequently taken up, and employed about what is indifferent. But this point will be more fully conſidered under the next head, wherein I propoſed to ſhew the advantages of induſtry, and the danger and diſadvantage of being *ſlothful in buſineſs*, as it is worded in my text.

I ſhall begin with thoſe temporal advantages which flow from induſtry, and then proceed to ſhew the good influence which it has upon our ſpiritual intereſt. To juſtify my inſiſting on the former of theſe, I deſire it may be conſidered, that in holy writ we meet with frequent recommendations of induſtry drawn from this very topic: particularly by the wiſe man, who dwells much upon it. We may take notice then in the firſt place, how much the public is indebted to induſtry and diligence. To this are owing the birth and improvement of arts and ſciences, which contribute ſo much both to the uſe and embellishment of life, and ſerve to liſt men up ſo much above inferior ranks of creatures. Accordingly thoſe nations which have made but little progreſs therein, are found to be barbarous and uncivilized; the countries wild and deſolate, and the men ſavages. Great
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and numberless are the advantages, which men derive from arts and sciences, and consequently from industry, by which they are both begun and carried on. An industrious people may not indeed always prosper and flourish, because they may lie under the disadvantage of an unhappy government, or other inconveniencies, which may keep them low, and disappoint their diligence. But there cannot be a flourishing people without industry, whatever other advantages they may be possessed of. For without this the benefits of nature must be, in a great measure, lost, and the blessings of Providence thrown away. There are flourishing nations in the world, that wholly owe their power and prosperity, next to the blessing of Heaven, to their being remarkably industrious, which has raised and advanced them, in spite of many great obstacles and discouraging difficulties that stood in their way. And there are other nations, which, notwithstanding many and great natural advantages, have never distinguished themselves, for want of taking the pains necessary thereto. Their sloth has kept them down, and buried them in obscurity. Or perhaps they have become a prey to other more active nations, and been spoiled of their riches, as well as deprived of their liberty.

liberty. Those natural blessings which they let lie unimproved, have tempted others to invade and over-run their country. And thus they have fallen a public sacrifice to their own sloth and inactivity. As liberty is a great promoter and encourager of industry, so industry is the best guard to liberty. Strength and power avail nothing, if they be not exerted; and exerted they cannot be to advantage, without pains and industry. Thus sloth naturally tends to slavery as well as poverty. Nor is it any wonder that Providence should frequently suffer those hands to be tied, which would not work when they were at liberty. An industrious people have the best title to the protection of Heaven, whilst the lazy are left destitute, and abandoned to the ill effects of their own sluggishness. *The hand of the diligent shall bear rule, says the wise man, but the slothful shall be under tribute.*

Having thus briefly touched upon the advantages of industry with relation to the public, I shall now consider the temporal advantages which accrue from it to particular persons. The tendency which it has to raise men in the world is so clear and manifest, that it is needless to insist upon it. Ordinarily speaking, it is the only way to wealth, which cannot be acquired with-

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out it. Men indeed may inherit riches, and be wealthy that way without pains. But even then without industry they cannot improve them, nor perhaps keep what they have. And besides, idleness naturally brings them into such courses as tend to waste their fortunes, and reduce them to want. And as to those who have their fortunes to make, they must necessarily take pains. They may as well pretend to be wise without instruction, as rich without diligence. If a man's condition be very low, he must labour for a subsistence. And if it be moderate, he must be industrious, if he will advance it. This is too evident to need a proof. He must needs *become poor that deal-eth with a slack hand*, according to Solomon's observation, *but the hand of the diligent maketh rich*. And as men thus get by being diligent, so they thrive in a double respect. The same royal author tells us, that *the substance of a diligent man is precious*. His diligence first brings him in gain, and then contributes to secure it when it is got. He whose wealth is of his own acquiring, is likeliest to understand the value of it. He knows how he got it, and will therefore know how he spends it. Thus his substance will wear well, and make a better proof upon this account. Besides, the blessing of
Heaven

Heaven goes along with his labours, and prospers his endeavours. What is got by honest industry has the protection of Providence for its security. And this matter has confirmation from the mouth of the same author, *Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished; but he that gathereth by labour shall encrease.* Honour likewise, as well as wealth, must be obtained by these means. Industry is the high road to preferment, which, ordinarily speaking, cannot be arrived at any other way. *Seest thou,* says the same wise prince, *a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men.*

As industry makes men prosper in the world, and advances their conditions, so perhaps it might not be improper to add, that it contributes to the preservation of health. Human bodies are framed after such a manner, as to stand in constant need of exercise. And no doubt this was contrived so by Providence, on purpose to keep them in employment. We may look upon it as a natural check upon sloth, and a kind of security to the pursuit of business, that no motive whatsoever might be wanting to spur man on to that labour and industry for which he was designed. There is no

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doubt but business may be immoderately followed, and that a man may be sometimes too industrious, and thereby prejudice himself in this respect. And so may any virtue run into an extreme, and there lose itself. This is no disparagement to industry when governed by the rules of discretion. Moderate labour is nevertheless beneficial, or rather necessary. Those who are skilled in the nature of human bodies do assign reasons for it, and shew how it comes to pass. It is universally confessed, that sloth is an enemy to health, and moderate labour or exercise very advantageous. And this truth is abundantly confirmed by experience; long life being most frequently to be found among the laborious part of mankind. Accordingly it is observable, that they who decline business, do nevertheless follow it, as it were, under disguise. They sometimes labour, and take as much pains in the pursuit of diversions, as others do about the most weighty employments. And was not health supported by this expedient, every man would be forced to submit to business, or he must cut short the thread of his life. In short, idleness may be looked upon as a dead weight upon a man's constitution. It fills him full of infirmities, and naturally tends to

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to shorten his days. As if Nature had intended, that he who was resolved to do but little good in the world, should not stay long in it, but should be cut off as an unprofitable member, and a nuisance to society. From what has been said it appears, that we may properly enough say of industry, what the wise man says of wisdom, *Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand, riches and honour.*

We may consider, in the next place, the pleasure and satisfaction which redounds from the pursuit of any honest employment. As to which it must be granted, that men's inclinations do not always lead them to business; but then it is because they are depraved. A wicked man thinks virtue unpleasant; so likewise a vitiated palate can relish nothing that is wholesome. In like manner, where idleness has got possession, business becomes a grievance. But still in itself it is valuable in this respect. Custom indeed bears a great sway in this, as in all other cases. Those who have inured themselves to business and employment, do very often like it so well, that they know not how to live without it. It must undoubtedly therefore be pleasant to

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them. Perhaps it is gain which greatly contributes to make it so. Let what will make it so, if the motive be honest, no objection can be drawn from thence. Lawful gain may certainly be lawfully followed. But doubtless a man may take a pleasure in being industrious, and minding his business, upon further views than barely the love of gain. His very employment may be pleasing and delightful to him, taken abstractedly from other considerations. However, he may find great satisfaction in industry, as it is a part of his duty, as it is pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God, as it enables him to do good in his generation, and more particularly to *provide for his own household*; which whosoever neglects is, as the apostle declares, *worse than an infidel*. Not to mention his having an eye upon those spiritual advantages, which I have not yet considered. So that a man may take pleasure in business, both upon its own account, and for the sake of those many advantages which attend it. If it be said, that hard labour is troublesome and painful; yet, nevertheless, custom will, in a great measure, render it otherwise. However, there are two things to be duly considered: The one is, that
hard

hard labour, whatever it be in itself, is much pleasanter than constant idleness. Doing nothing is certainly the hardest labour that man can undergo. It is the most restless and uneasy state imaginable. And so it may well be, because it is repugnant to the nature of man's mind, the very essence of which is action. When a man has no employment for his thoughts, they are apt to work inwards, and prey upon themselves. A slothful man's time is a greater burthen to him, than a laborious man's work. The latter knows how to dispatch the one; but the former knows not how to get rid of the other. It still hangs upon his hands, and perpetually troubles and torments him. As rest gives refreshment to a laborious man, so an idle man can find no ease till he takes up some business or employment. Which brings me to the other thing to be considered: namely, that as hard labour is better than idleness; so it mightily recommends rest to a man, and gives him a true relish of it. The slothful man is glutted and surfeited with his ease; but that leisure, which the industrious man finds in his intermissions from business, is truly delightful to him. Labour indeed and rest do mutually recommend each other; not only for

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the pleasure of variety, but as the succession is agreeable to nature. When a man is wearied with toil and business, his spirits are sunk, and he finds and feels he wants rest. Upon this account it is welcome when it arrives. So likewise when he is refreshed, and his strength and vigour return, his appetite for business returns along with them; and he goes to his work with the same alacrity that he came from it. This is nothing but what is natural, and for that reason must be pleasant to all, but such as are besotted with sloth. It appears from hence, as if Providence designed men the true enjoyment of no blessings whatsoever, without the price of labour; since even rest has a natural kind of tax set upon it. Though a man may get rest, without antecedent labour, yet it is then of no value, nor will it do him any good. If he intends to enjoy it, he must take some pains before hand. As a man must fast a convenient time, if he will have an appetite to his food; so he must employ himself some way or other, were it for nothing but to get an appetite to rest. Ease, to the laborious man, is as grateful as food to the hungry; but to the idle man, it is like feeding upon a full stomach.

I am

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I am now to consider industry with an eye to religion. As to which it may be observed, in the first place, that it highly promotes the glory of God. A due improvement of his gifts and talents must necessarily redound to his honour. Industry brings to light the hidden works and wonders of nature; discovers their various ends and uses, and thereby gives men a proper occasion to acknowledge God's wisdom in the creation of the world; to proclaim his power, and extol his goodness. And as industry reflects honour upon God, by giving such a lustre to the natural world, so it still more successfully answers the same end by the effect which it has upon the moral world. By industry societies are brought into order and regularity, governments are framed, and wholesome laws are enacted. And what it thus sets up, it continues firmly to support. Hereby the members of a community acquit themselves carefully in their respective trusts, and rightly execute their several functions. Now this order and œconomy among men manifestly glorify their Maker, who is a God of order, and not of confusion. The wisdom and perfection of the Creator clearly shine through the conduct and management of his creatures.

Industry is a great friend to religion, in

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that it not only makes men useful members of a commonwealth, but enables them to do much good in a private capacity, to their neighbours, friends, and relations. It puts it into their power to exercise acts of charity, relieve the needy, and succour those in distress. Thus when the apostle enjoins labour, and requires men *to work with their hands the thing which is good*, one end which he has in view is, *that they may have to give to him that needeth*. But the greatest advantage of industry is, that it contributes so mightily to the preservation of innocence, by securing men from the ill effects of sloth. Idleness is the great inlet to licentiousness, and tends to all manner of vice and immorality. It corrupts the principles of religion, and opens a door to all kinds of sin and wickedness. There is but a short step from doing nothing, to doing mischief. The mind of man will not sleep; but his thoughts and his passions will drive at something. He is prone to evil, and will naturally run into it, if due employments be wanting to correct the bias. When men have nothing to do, they soon grow sick of their own company. The entertainments of learning, of nature, of reason, are not agreeable to the bulk of mankind, who have neither capacity nor relish for things of this kind.

Idleness

Idleness therefore gives full scope to all sorts of temptations, against which the mind is utterly unguarded. It draws men into ill company, and exposes them to the infection of all those vices which are there to be met with. In a word, men hereby lie open to all the solicitations of sin, and the prevailing influence of ill examples. And though idleness be thus a sufficient tempter of itself, yet it also exposes them, in a particular manner, to the temptations of their spiritual adversary. This is his grand opportunity; and no doubt he will strike in with it, to facilitate men's ruin, and hasten their destruction.

It were well if the ill effects of idleness terminated in those who were guilty of it, and reached no further. But as it dishonours God, and is in every respect pernicious to a man's self; so it has a great tendency to make him transgress against his neighbour. And thus it becomes, in a new respect, prejudicial to the public. As an idle person is peculiarly liable to the contagion of other men's vices, so others are in danger of being affected by his idleness. It is his custom to put a stop where he can to other men's business, as well as his own; as well to keep himself in countenance, as to encourage his beloved sloth. It is natural for such persons to endeavour to

get companions as idle as themselves ; and consequently, if they do not find them, to make them such ; this perhaps being the only instance of their taking pains. Thus other men are brought into a snare, and oftentimes ruined by these means. And thus likewise business is interrupted, to the detriment of the public.

But further: Idleness, as was observed before, reduces men to want, and tends directly to poverty. If a man be low in the world, it will keep him so ; and if he enjoy a fair fortune, idleness will find means to sink it. And when he is brought to this pass, he must necessarily either work, or do worse : it is not likely that he will even then take up with working, as having been accustomed to idleness. And thus he naturally falls to stealing, as the likeliest method to supply his wants, in an easy and cheap way. Hereby he thinks he can gratify his sloth, and at the same time reap the fruits of other men's labour. Thus we see idleness brings men into the most enormous crimes. And here again likewise the public suffers greatly by it. Could nothing more be said for industry, than that it tends to keep men just and honest, even this would surely be a character sufficient to recommend it. Could nothing more be said
against

against idleness, than that it tends to theft, and all kinds of wrong and injustice, even this might well be thought enough to make men dread and detest it.

Lastly, Idleness tends to disturb the peace of society. Intermeddling in other men's concerns generally ends in difference and disagreement. It kindles contentions, and creates feuds and animosities. Now idleness is frequently at the bottom of this mischief. What contributes so much to make men meddle with the affairs of others, as neglecting their own? Did they mind their own business, they have little leisure or inclination to intrude into other men's. And the more diligent they were at home, the less curious or busy they would be abroad. *We hear*, says the apostle, to the *Thessalonians*, *that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy bodies*; thereby plainly signifying the latter to be the effect of the former. *Now them*, continues he, *that are such, we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread*. And it is certain, that industry is an excellent expedient for the maintenance of peace, and the preservation of love and unity. A diligent attendance upon men's callings and employments cuts off many opportunities

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portunities of dissensions, and prevents those differences and ruptures, which are the natural consequences of idleness and sloth.

Thus we see how highly advantageous industry is to religion, by promoting many branches of men's duty; by securing their innocence in general, and keeping them out of many temptations, mischiefs, and snares, which they will other wise unavoidably fall into. It is not indeed an absolute security. A man may take ill measures, and follow bad courses, in an industrious way; but industry is not to be blamed for that. Besides, if an industrious man may, an idle man must go astray. There is this mighty difference between them, that whereas the one may be guilty, the other cannot be innocent.

To conclude: It behoves, however, the industrious to take care, that while they apply themselves so diligently to the affairs of this world, they by no means neglect the more weighty concerns of the next: that they suffer not worldly business to engross their thoughts and endeavours; lest, while they are thus carefully employed about *things temporal*, they *finally lose the things that are eternal*.

S E R M O N X.

Of Diligence in our spiritual Concerns.

ECCLES. IX. Part of the 10th Verse.

*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with
thy might.*

THE great advantages of strict application, and vigorous endeavours, in the common affairs of life, are obvious and well known; and accordingly men's designs, thus executed, frequently take effect, and are crowned with suitable success. But, alas! our great spiritual concern, the main business of life, *the one thing needful*, does not meet with proportionable zeal and attention. This we are apt to pursue indolently and remissly, and even to think of it in a superficial manner. How very wrong, unreasonable, and preposterous

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posterior this is, and what fatal consequences attend it, well deserves to be considered by us. I shall therefore apply the general precept in my text to this particular concern; namely, the obligations of religion, and the discharge of our duty; the cultivation and improvement of our minds, and the working out our eternal salvation: endeavouring to shew, from several considerations, that we ought to attend to it with all diligence, and exert ourselves therein, to the utmost of our power. Let us then observe, in the

First place, the singular moment and vast importance of this work; whereon depend our supreme interest, and our well-being for ever. It is not possible for the mind of man to conceive a more important event, than the gain or loss of a blessed immortality: in comparison of which, all our temporal affairs appear not only inconsiderable, but really vain and contemptible. If at any time we fail and fall short in the pursuit of these, the disappointment is moderate; should not affect us deeply, and cannot affect us long. To aim at the good things of this world, is not unreasonable; for some value they have, and by consequence deserve a proportionable concern. But if we rate them not beyond this

this proportion, the want of success can never be very formidable. Many of the grievances of this life are purely imaginary; and even those which are real, are commonly much aggravated by our fanciful opinions and mischievous customs. The demands of nature are little and few; soon supplied, and easily satisfied. The sting of adversity seldom therefore consists in their being unanswered; but in the absence rather of those superfluities, which men's wanton appetites and luxurious imaginations are continually craving. And as to those hardships and pressures which are real and unavoidable; they are greatly alleviated by the shortness of their duration, and the encouraging hopes and prospects of a happy futurity.—But if, neglecting our immortal souls, we make little or no provision for that futurity; if, depraving our faculties, and defacing the image of God, we let his gifts run to ruin; if we continue unprepared, unqualified for that blessed state which he has provided for his faithful servants; how deplorable, how desperate will be our condition! without remedy, without relief, without hope. To be for ever banished from the presence of God, and the habitations of the just, will be found a loss above all estimate. And yet this is only a negative idea of such a state;

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state; the positive evils of which are neither to be described, nor conceived. We are as sure as truth can make us, that vice and wickedness will find no place in the regions of bliss. A God of infinite purity and perfection can never suffer it; and if he could, even there it would be miserable; an incurable plague, an eternal self-tormenter. Whoever aims at happiness, and draws plans of prosperity, either present or future, excluding virtue, forms the vainest project under the sun. He might as well seek light in the grave, or liberty in the dungeon. It is absolutely repugnant to the nature of things, that a rational creature should be made happy without virtue; and he who attempts it, either builds without a foundation, or on a quick-sand. Yet this is not the whole of the case. Not only happiness, and that of the purest and noblest kind, but an eternity of such happiness, depends on our virtuous improvements. That state of bliss which is set before us, and offered to our choice, is not only unspeakably perfect, but of endless duration: which makes an infinite addition to the weight and strength of the motive.—— We see then plainly, that the affair before us concerns us most highly, and is of the utmost importance. It is not possible to frame an
idea,

idea, or form the least conception of any thing equal to it. An uninterrupted and perpetual possession of the greatest happiness we are capable of, is a good so immense, so entirely complete, that it fills and surpasses all our desires, and leaves nothing to be wished. And since a virtuous course of life is the indispensable condition of obtaining this mighty good, and the only qualification for it; we cannot be at a loss in judging what it is that deserves our principal care, and most earnest endeavours. Most certain it is, that neither our *hands*, nor our *hearts*, can find any thing to do worthy to be compared with it. For how should a few precarious years weigh against eternity? But,

Secondly, The necessity of great care and diligence in the discharge of our duty, appears also from the extent and compass of it. It comprehends a great variety of particulars, none of which can safely be neglected; and requires constancy and perseverance to our lives end. In the cultivation of our minds, many things are to be learned, many things unlearned; many prejudices to be weeded out, and many errors pulled up by the roots. And when the understanding, duly prepared, has received the seed of truth, early fruits are expected. The pre-

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cepts of virtue and religion must immediately be reduced to practice ; and, in order thereto, the several branches of our duty deeply impressed on our minds and memories. Much application is requisite to maintain and fix the authority of reason, and preserve the subordination of inferior faculties. The obliquity of our wills, however contracted, must be rectified to the utmost of our power. We must carefully watch our weak humours, our wild appetites, our wandering inclinations. Those affections which are natural must be governed, and those which are acquired restrained and curbed. The *heart* must be *kept with all diligence*, and all its movements under direction. An habitual guard is requisite, not only on our words and actions, but in respect of our thoughts ; whereon depends our whole conduct. There it is that our designs are formed, whether good or bad ; and if our thoughts be not cautiously observed, and adjusted by the rules of sobriety and virtue, they are very apt to run adrift, and become licentious. Great circumspection, therefore, is necessary to regulate these springs of action, and prevent the first tendencies to disorder and confusion.——
In relation to our fellow-creatures, various duties

duties are incumbent on us ; as being bound to consult the interest of the community, and the welfare of individuals. The rules of justice and equity are to be inviolably maintained : we are to deal with all men truly and uprightly ; without fraud, without guile, without dissimulation ; conscientiously *doing to others what we would they should do unto us* ; and fulfilling, as far as in us lies, both in word and deed, the obligations of truth and righteousness. In like manner, we are to cultivate, what nature has planted in our hearts, a kind and benevolent disposition ; a charitable and merciful frame of mind ; *doing good unto all men*, as opportunity offers, and studiously endeavouring, within our sphere, to communicate good offices, and promote the peace and prosperity of mankind. In a word, we are bound to be grateful to our friends, placable to our enemies, and well affected towards all. — Another great and principal branch of duty is, that we *walk humbly with our God* ; filled with a deep sense of our own meanness and unworthiness, and of his transcendent majesty and boundless perfections : that we frequently and devoutly contemplate the excellence of his nature, and the glory of his attributes :

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that we carefully consider the wonderful operations of his hands: that we reflect not only how great He is in himself, but how good he is to us; pouring down upon us varieties of enjoyment, and crowning us with all mercies both spiritual and temporal. By these means we are to engage and fix our hearts; and to kindle in our breasts that pious flame which we hope shall burn for ever. Thus disposed, we shall naturally approach Him with profound reverence, gratitude, and adoration; paying Him cheerfully that homage and worship, that praise and thanksgiving, which are ever due to his holy name. In Him we shall place entire trust and confidence, and to his will submit with absolute resignation; professing and practising sincere obedience to his laws, and devoting ourselves to his honour and service. In fine, we are required to *put forth our whole strength*, and to *love Him*, who is infinitely worthy, *with all our hearts, and with all our souls*. And whenever we fail, even in this, or the foregoing instances; whenever we violate our obligations, and are conscious of transgressing our known duty; it becomes absolutely necessary to make up the breach by sincere repentance, and effectual reformation. This needful privilege

vilege christianity affords: but if we abuse and pervert it, it turns to no account, and we are only unprofitable penitents. — From this very imperfect sketch we cannot but perceive how copious and comprehensive our duty is; and, by consequence, that it calls for our constant attention, and most vigorous endeavours. We see plainly, that the discipline and culture of our souls will not admit of indolence, or indifference: that many virtuous habits must be formed; many christian graces planted: that such means are not only conducive to our main purpose, but indispensably necessary to fit us for that blessed state, and that glorious society which we hope for hereafter. And how can we wonder that this should be the case? Do we cheerfully take such pains for the small advantages of this short life, and would we do nothing, or next to nothing, for a blessed immortality? Does not such a prize well deserve an industrious preparation? If the work be not so light or short as we could wish it, let it suffice to say, that the profits are infinite, and the reward endless. But,

Thirdly, Another reason for diligence and application arises from the shortness and uncertainty of this present life. So precarious

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Is our continuance here, that we cannot promise ourselves one day, nor even depend on a single hour. By various accidents, and unavoidable misfortunes, not to mention the havoc of vicious courses; how common is it to see the thread of life broken in the midst, or even much sooner than that! But setting aside this consideration, and supposing the natural period fully and constantly reached, yet what is it? The extent of man's life is, at best, but a span: and how is that span shortened by continual avocations? The demands of nature, and the cares of this world, even when moderate, unavoidably consume the greatest part of our time; and leave but a small portion for the concerns of the soul, and the improvements of religion. This disadvantage would indeed be lessened, if the same husbandry were observed in our spiritual affairs, which is commonly used in our temporal. For in the midst of such employments, our thoughts are often at liberty, and might often be turned, to good purpose, towards objects of a higher nature. How easy, for instance, and how natural is the transition from the creatures to the Creator; from the works of nature to the power, wisdom, and goodness of their great Author?

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But, alas! we often want will to make a right use of such opportunities as we have; and such as, if well disposed, we could seldom long want. However, supposing time and opportunity used to the best advantage, yet, it must needs appear short, considering the fore-mentioned deductions, if we recollect the great number and variety of our obligations, and the multiplicity of things to be done. We are apt to think ourselves entirely and easily in our own power, and that virtue may at any time be cheaply purchased: but this only proves how little we are acquainted with the excellence of the one, or the impotence of the other. To purify and cleanse our souls from every pollution of sin and sense; to give them those graces and accomplishments which the gospel requires; to fit them up for heaven, and educate them for eternity, safely and successfully, is a work of quite another nature than we are apt to imagine it; and indeed, without care and application more than common, how can we think to be duly qualified for the society of angels and *saints made perfect*? How render ourselves *meet partakers of that glorious inheritance*? This leads me, in the

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Fourth place, to observe how prone we are to deceive ourselves doubly in this important affair. We deceive ourselves not only about the sufficiency of our preparations, but also concerning the security of our title. We know in general, that *without holiness no man* shall find admission; that without renovation of mind, and purity of heart, all hopes are vain; that what we have done amiss must be effectually undone, and a real reformation wrought; that good habits and virtuous dispositions must be fixed and cherished, and the love of God and goodness rooted in the soul; this, I say, we know, certainly know, whenever we please to consider: and yet so unaccountably weak or wilful we are, as often to fall short of this; contenting ourselves with faint resolutions and feeble endeavours, and building all our hopes of hereafter on the most uncertain foundation in the world.— Since then we are so dangerously partial in our own favour, and so liable to deceive ourselves in the estimate of our performances, and the progress of our improvements, certainly we ought, in regard to our own safety, to make suitable allowances: that is, since we are so apt to sink beneath the mark, to direct our aims accordingly; and,

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and, instead of venturing our eternal interest on so precarious, and, perhaps, desperate a bottom, to strive with all our might, and exert with our utmost vigour, to *make our calling and election sure*; as sure, I mean, as the frailty of our nature, and the fallibility of our understandings, will admit. If we fail, and fall short of what is absolutely necessary to salvation, the consequence is utter ruin; whereas, if at any time, or in any instance, we go beyond, the consequence is perfectly safe; and not only safe, but vastly beneficial, as will presently be shewn. Most highly then it concerns us to guard against such a fatal misconduct; and to make allowances for the treachery of our hearts, the delusions of partiality, and the *deceitfulness of sin*. In short, if we have any true regard to our own welfare, we shall make it our chief business *so to run* the race of this short life, that we *may obtain* the prize of a life everlasting.

Fifthly, and Lastly, There is yet a further reason, and that a very strong one, for the application of our best endeavours. Let it be supposed, what seldom is the case, that a man has gone further in the practice of virtue than what is strictly necessary to secure his salvation; how will the consequence affect

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affect him? Has he mispent his time, and lost his labour? Is it in vain that he has thus exerted himself, and will his zeal and industry turn to no account? Could this be truly alleged, or justly supposed, it might afford men a plausible excuse. But there is no sort of ground for such an allegation; nor any colour for the supposition. No religious performance, no virtuous improvement, ever was, or ever can be lost, while men adhere to their duty. No worthy action can be fruitless to the agent, whatever it may be in other respects. Not even a pious thought, or a benevolent wish, can fail of some good effect. Most certain it is, both from reason and revelation, that *whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*; even in full proportion to his endeavours, be they never so active, never so abundant. Every virtue, every degree of every virtue, is profitable, both here and hereafter: and however some of its advantages may be obstructed in this life, they can never fail in that which is to come. Of this we shall soon be convinced, if we consider the nature of virtue, and those declarations of God's will which revealed religion sets before us. For if virtue naturally tends and conduces to human happiness, such an effect must needs
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be proportionable to the force and extent of the cause: so that high degrees of virtue cannot fail to produce high degrees of bliss; and indeed *every* improvement will as certainly turn to account as *any* improvement. In short, the largest cannot be ineffectual, nor the least fruitless. And the case is precisely the same in respect of divine appointment. For on whatever account, and by whatever reasons determined, the great Governor of the world rewards the righteous; the same reasons and motives must unavoidably induce him to reward them in proportion to the several degrees and measures of righteousness. Accordingly, we find this doctrine clearly set forth, and fully confirmed in scripture: which, as it observes to us a great diversity of *gifts* and *talents* among men, so, conformable thereto, it assures us of a great variety of *mansions* in the heavenly state; where the saints will not only be distinguished, but differ from each other as visibly and remarkably, *as one star differeth from another star in glory*.—Whether then we consider the inward joys, or the outward glories which belong to virtue, and will crown it for ever, most evident it is, that none of its graces, none of its improvements, can fail of a suitable and full effect.

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And greater encouragement than this is not to be expected, and scarce to be wished.

Upon the whole, it appears from the foregoing considerations, that we have all possible reason to act with our whole might, and exert our utmost endeavours in the execution of this great concern ; and indeed how any motives of greater weight could have been set before us, seems very hard to conceive. I meddle not at present with the internal obligations of *duty*, and the pleasing attractions of virtue itself: let the matter be examined wholly on the foot of *interest*, and determined accordingly. If, relying on the assurances of reason and revelation, we firmly expect an immortal state hereafter ; we may refer it even to the decision of self-love, what is fit to be done, and how we ought to proceed. Let us but consider, for one moment, what eternity is, and how it will be enjoyed by the faithful children of God ; and then, let us doubt, if we can, whether we ought not to be in earnest with our duty ; where our true interest lies, and our principal *treasure* ought to be *laid up*. If to possess the greatest happiness that we are capable of, and that for ever, be not our main point, our chief concern ; our faculties entirely delude us ; words have no meaning, and things themselves have no reality.

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reality.—The enjoyments of this world are, comparatively speaking, neither solid nor durable; and however they may smile in prospect, seldom satisfy us in possession. If then we toil, and take true pains in acquiring such precarious and perishing things as these, how can we think any care too great in securing a blessed immortality? Since so very much depends on our success; our diligence, our perseverance, our utmost efforts, cannot but be well and wisely employed. To serve God, and discharge our duty as penuriously as we can, is dangerous thrift; since a partial estimate, a false reckoning, may blast all our hopes, and ruin us for ever. And, setting this terrible danger aside, we have further seen, that such a way of proceeding is the most wretched husbandry in the world. In our temporal affairs we seldom act by any such rule; but strenuously contend, though the encouragements, at best, be very small, as well as uncertain. Whereas, in the case before us, the recompense is not only sure, but immensely great. We have divine security for it, that whatever good we *sow* in this life, we shall *reap* ten thousand fold in the next. And if such an excitement have no effect on us, our perfidious hearts betray us, and are the greatest enemies we can have. Such an ob-
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ject as this will abundantly justify the most ardent affection, and even demand the highest pitch to which our desires can possibly rise. When such treasures, such glories, are in view ; moderation is mere folly, and ambition true wisdom. The utmost preparation men can make for life eternal, is so far from being superfluous, that the only concern of the blessed will be, that they could carry it no further.——To conclude ; if we really mean ourselves good, and wish our own welfare ; if we desire to promote our true interest in the best and most effectual manner ; let us earnestly strive to obtain, and fit ourselves for that state, where every thing will concur to complete our condition, and crown our desires : that we may finally partake, with joy unspeakable, of those streams of bliss, those *rivers of pleasure, which flow for ever at God's right hand.*

S E R M O N XI.

Of Censoriousness.

MATTH. VII. Ver. 1.

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

THE general precepts and prohibitions of scripture are usually expressed in such a latitude, that if we were always to understand them in a strict sense, and to take that meaning which lies uppermost, we should frequently pervert the laws of God, and turn our duty upside down. Particularly in respect to the prohibition in my text; to understand it absolutely, and without proper exceptions and limitations, would be taking it in such a sense, as is neither consistent with the nature and reason of things,

things, nor the very being of human society. It could not possibly be intended to have any relation to the judicial proceedings of magistrates, whose office it is to sit in judgment; to condemn and punish evil-doers. Nor could it be designed as a bar to the just admonitions and reproofs of any lawful superiors. Even among equals, and private persons, it could not extend to all kinds of judgment. There are some cases and characters which ought to be, and indeed must be, unavoidably judged, and universally condemned, as far as they are known. And in such as are less notorious, it may be proper, in some circumstances, that they should neither be overlooked, nor passed over in silence.—But the practice forbidden in my text is of a very different kind from any of these or the like exceptions. Namely, when private persons judge one another, either in thought or in word, secretly or openly, without reason, without grounds, without evidence, or perhaps against it; when they judge their brethren rashly, unadvisedly, partially, unjustly, uncharitably, or contemptuously: when they pass their judgments and censures in the dark, and shoot out their arrows at random: when they run into invectives giddily and blindly; and

and pronounce sentence, not according to the merits of the cause; but according to some humour, fancy, prejudice, or passion: when they charge men with faults, which they never really committed, or magnify what they have: when they aggravate every small blemish, and spread a little blot over a whole character: when they are ready to behold and blame the least *motes* in the *eyes* of others, and at the same time overlook *beams* in their own: when, in dubious cases, instead of putting the fairest constructions on men's actions, they pick out the worst, in opposition to all the rules both of charity and equity: when they not only take cognizance of overt-acts, but pretend to judge of men's secret thoughts, designs, purposes, and affections: in fine, when, *sitting in the seat of the scornful*, they raise injurious imputations, and, either maliciously or wantonly, dictate scandal, and propagate reproach.

These and all such-like practices are, without question, prohibited in my text; as appears not only from the reason of the thing, but the whole tenor of scripture. Whatever judging, whatever censuring, is contrary to truth and justice, humanity and charity, civility and good manners, is all

here meant and implied, and elsewhere expressly forbidden. The generality of christians seem either not to know this, or not to regard it. For how otherwise could they so notoriously transgress this branch of their duty? How prone are they, upon the slightest occasions, to judge rigorously, and to think and speak hardly of one another! Though they profess a religion that breathes nothing but peace and love, and the very essence of which is charity; yet a spirit of disaffection, censoriousness, and slander, too often finds a way into their minds, corrupts their tempers, and diffuses a secret venom through their whole behaviour. How frequently do they sit in judgment on one another's characters, traducing and vilifying whom they please, and when they think fit! As if ill words and hard speeches passed for nothing; and no account was to be given of them! Little courts of inquisition are set up, and a kind of tribunal erected in most companies, where men's conduct is examined, their actions are canvassed, and sentence is passed, according to the humours and inclinations of these officious inquisitors. Is there any subject of conversation more common, or more fashionable, than the faults and follies of mankind? A copious subject,

subject, God knows, if all of us had not work enough at home, in rectifying and reforming what is amiss in ourselves. Do we really and sincerely desire a public reformation? The likeliest way in the world to succeed, is for every man to undertake himself. To neglect our own case, and at the same time make ourselves very busy with other people's, is certainly beginning at the wrong end, and can produce nothing but mischief. In order to bring us off from this way of thinking and acting, I shall briefly endeavour these two things:

First, To point out the principal causes and occasions of such a censorious disposition. And,

Secondly, To shew the great evil and malignity of it.

First, I am to point out the principal causes and occasions of this censorious disposition. And what other causes can we ascribe it to than pride and vanity, ill-will and envy, indolence and idleness? These are, doubtless, the chief.——It is frequently owing to the pride of our hearts, and an immoderate degree of self-love, that we are so prone to judge and censure our

brethren. Whenever we set too high a value on ourselves, we are always under a temptation of disparaging others. And the higher we stand in our own esteem, the greater will be the temptation, and the more apt we shall be to look about us with contempt. If our vanity make us very solicitous to distinguish ourselves, and we find, as it often happens, that we cannot rise in a regular way, cannot advance above the common level; then the only expedient left for distance and distinction, is to depress our neighbours. It may be in our power to debase *them*, though we be not able to exalt *ourselves*. And hence we are naturally tempted to make use of the vile methods before mentioned; to cast a blemish on other men's names, and sully their characters, in order to make our own appear the fairer upon a comparison.—To which may be added, that pride and self-conceit make us apt to look upon those things as faults and misdemeanors, which are really none at all. If other men pay not the same deference to our understandings that we do ourselves; if they presume to differ from us in opinion, and refuse to think, speak, and act, just as we would have them, they would be in danger of incurring our displeasure,

pleasure, and provoking our censures. Our vanity cannot bear contradiction, and therefore we make a crime of it, and treat it accordingly. Hence much opprobrious language, and many injurious reflections; and we are therefore petulant, censorious, and abusive, because we are vain, arrogant, and proud. In short, from this corrupt fountain flows a great share of those bitter waters, which infect all societies, and poison human life. But,

Secondly, Another cause of censoriousness, and that a very fruitful one, is hatred and *ill-will*; which generally exerts itself in uncharitable thoughts, and groundless censures. It frequently gives such a bent to the mind, and such a bias to the judgment, that scarce any evidence is sufficient to counterpoise it. Dislike and disaffection are extremely apt to corrupt and pervert men's faculties. They sometimes blind their eyes, and sometimes make them see double. Hence it comes to pass, that while many things good and praiseworthy are utterly overlooked, the least blemish is fastened on; and magnified beyond all measure and proportion. So great are the partialities and prepossessions of ill-will, that it shall neither suffer men to think reasonably, nor speak honestly. Their sentiments are infected, and their language tainted. While

hatred is fermenting and festering in their hearts, the *poison of asps is under their lips*. Such is the nature of this perverse passion, that it blots the fairest characters, and blackens every thing it touches; turns honour into ignominy, merit into mischief, and virtue into vice.— And when it happens to be accompanied with *envy*, it is still more turbulent and outrageous. Envy heightens and enflames it where it is, and produces it where it is not: gives it greater force, and a keener edge; and both together make men eager, and restless, and furious, in their persecutions. The envious man not only grudges the prosperity of his neighbour, but is oftentimes exceedingly mortified and afflicted at the sight of it. Being out of patience at his success and advancement in the world, he wickedly wishes, and too often endeavours, to bring him down again. If this be out of his power, and he cannot accomplish his design any other way, he attacks his good name, and strikes at his reputation. Hence a train of insinuations, suggestions, censures, calumnies. Hence various arts of secret detraction, or open defamation. In short, great pains are taken, and all endeavours used, to gratify an infamous passion, at the expence very often of truth, charity, probity, and justice. But,

Thirdly, A habit of censoriousness is sometimes

times derived from milder and more innocent causes. It may be, and sometimes is, occasioned by superfluity of leisure, and want of better employment. When men's time hangs upon their hands, their thoughts and tongues are apt to run adrift, and to wander from object to object, from subject to subject, just as it happens. And thus without pride, without malice, without envy, they fall into this practice, not innocently indeed, but insensibly; it may be through mere wantonness, and for amusement; perhaps to keep up conversation, and as a help to discourse. Hereby they are drawn into rash judgments, censures, and reflections, which are carelessly thrown about them; as the fool is represented in Scripture, tossing *firebrands* merely for *sport*. As if idleness could give any man a privilege to be injurious! or impertinence atone for calumny and scandal! But, in fact and reality, it often happens, though a seeming contradiction, that want of business makes men busy-bodies; and they rail and revile, because they have nothing else to do.—From this brief survey of the causes and occasions of rash judging and censoring, we may evidently perceive, that it always springs from a mean and ignoble original, and very often from such a one as is altogether base and detestable.

testable——But the odious nature of this practice will more fully appear, if we proceed, as was proposed, in the

Second place, To consider the great evil and malignity of it, which will appear in several respects: for it implies great presumption and impiety towards God, great injustice towards men, and great folly in respect of ourselves.——*First,* It is an invasion of God's prerogative. In such cases as we have been considering, no man has any right, any authority, to judge his brethren. The Apostle speaks of it with a kind of surprise and indignation: *Who art thou, says he, that judgest another's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.* Whatever judicial powers may be delegated to magistrates, and other superiors; yet how does it appear, that private Christians are ordinarily possessed of any such right? Where do we read, that either *judgment, or vengeance, belongeth unto them?* By what authority do they sit as judges over one another? And not only so, but turn accusers, and even executioners? Not indeed in respect of men's lives, but what is sometimes equally dear, their reputations. These are commonly used and dealt with at pleasure; though, in truth and reality, they have no more

more to do with the one, than they have with the other.—But further, this practice implies a kind of impious pretension to one of the divine attributes. Most certain it is, that we pass judgment in many cases, and on many occasions, when we cannot possibly have any ground to go upon, or know any thing at all of the matter; unless we can see into men's hearts, and *understand their thoughts afar off*. The goodness or badness of many actions depends on such circumstances as can only be known to God, and a man's own conscience. As then we have no right to judge; so, in many cases, neither have we ability: nor can we pretend to it without the highest arrogance and presumption.—Again; considering the goodness of God, and his gracious treatment of us all; how impious and ungrateful must it be to proceed against our fellow-creatures by quite contrary rules! Have we not all the reason in the world to follow, as far as we can, this divine example? And are we not obliged in gratitude to observe it in the case before us? Has he ever exercised towards us so much patience, gentleness, kindness, and long suffering; and shall we deal hardly, severely, unrighteously, and cruelly with his subjects and servants, who wear his image, and belong to his family?

mily? How unfuitable and ungrateful a return is this to the goodness of God! And what an indignity to our common patron, and benefactor! But,

Secondly, This practice offers great injury and injustice to men. This will appear by considering the damage that is done by it, and the unrighteous and dishonourable method of doing it. Concerning the former I shall only need to observe, that to rob men of their good names, is to deprive them of a possession which is, and must be, highly valued by them. This is made natural and necessary by the original principles of our minds. To which must be added, that, in respect of a considerable part of mankind, prosperity and success in the world depend upon reputation. To blemish their character is to blast their credit; and both together amount to a damage of the deepest nature. And what greatly heightens the injury is, that, in a great measure, it is often irreparable. The wounds which are made in men's reputation are rarely and difficultly healed; and when they are, yet they generally leave scars behind them.—But to proceed; this practice is not only injurious in its consequences, but every way unjust in itself. Censorious persons, as I before took notice, often judge in the dark;

dark; often censure what they understand nothing of; often condemn both men and things, merely from a vain, or wanton, or perverse humour, without any grounds or evidence at all. Sometimes they rashly charge men with things that were never done; at other times find fault with such actions as are perfectly innocent, and perhaps commendable. If any thing done have but a suspicious appearance, a dubious outside, or a disagreeable circumstance; this is commonly enough for their purpose; they seldom look any deeper, or enquire any further. What the agent's aim or intention might be, that they rarely either know, consider, or care. And when they do happen to hit upon such points, as are both really facts, and really faults; they are so far from making fair and favourable allowances, that they frequently magnify and misrepresent; swelling the account, increasing the blame, and aggravating the charge, beyond all bounds of sobriety and truth. In short, without regarding either evidence or equity; their usual practice is to judge at large, to reflect at random, and condemn at a venture.—The notorious injustice of such proceedings needs no proof. They shew themselves sufficiently in their own naked colours. However, it
may

may be proper to add, that if they, who are addicted to such a practice, cannot, or will not, see the iniquity of it ; yet they can feel it, when it comes home upon themselves. Whenever false or groundless reflections are thrown upon *them*, they are sure to complain in their turn, and as loudly as any. Might not then their own consciences put them in mind, that they ought not to do to others what they cannot endure should be done to themselves ? If this be not reasonable, it is impossible to say what is. — But further ; another circumstance that renders this practice still more base and dishonourable, is, that such censures are usually thrown out behind men's backs ; and vented only for the most part in close communications and private scandal ; and that in direct opposition to the law of God, which denounces a curse against him *who smiteth his neighbour secretly*. And without question the case is the same, whether he be thus smitten in his person or his property : I say, his property, because every man's good name is his undoubted property, till it be fairly forfeited. But to return : this circumstance cannot but be a great aggravation of the crime we are speaking of. Thus attacking men at a distance, and behind their backs, is like assaulting children and cripples, who are utterly

terly incapable of defending themselves. For what defence can the absent make, who know nothing at all of the charge that is brought against them? They are tried, and sentenced, without being heard, or suffered to speak one word in their own vindication. Open calumny, though a great injury, is, however, more generous than secret slander. The one may be compared to robbing on the highway; the other to night-thefts, and plunders in the dark. In fine, such a practice is not only doing great wrong; but it is doing it in the meanest, vilest, and most odious manner.

Thirdly, and Lastly, As it is great impiety towards God, and injustice towards men; so we may further observe, that it is great folly in respect of ourselves. This might be shewn at large by a great variety of arguments and considerations. But, at present, I shall confine myself to that which is specified in my text; where the ill effect and mischievous consequence of this vice are plainly pointed at: *judge not, that ye be not judged.* For we are expressly assured, that *with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again.* If it be asked by whom; the answer is, both by God and man; though in different senses and respects. Whoever is forward in censuring, and finding fault with other men, may naturally

naturally expect to be treated by them accordingly. No man can pretend to keep a clear character himself, who makes it his business to blemish his neighbour's. That scandal which he deals in, those hard reflections which he throws about him, will be sure to recoil sooner or later, and fall back upon his own head. In a word, an ill name is in fact, and ever will be, the fate of the censorious. Nor, in the nature of the thing, can it well be otherwise.—But in truth this is only a small matter, in comparison of what follows. Rash judging, and hard censures, not only expose men to the resentment of their fellow-creatures, but render them obnoxious to the just judgment of God himself; who has frequently declared himself the avenger of all such unrighteous practices. Not that he will judge them unjustly, because they have judged others so; but that he will treat men rigorously or gently, severely or mercifully, according to the manner in which they have treated their fellow-creatures. The great Governor of the world will not fail to judge it in truth and righteousness; let men's judgments be ever so unrighteous, or their provocations ever so great. But for that reason, and on that very account, he may and will have regard to the foregoing rule,
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the equity of which is universally perceived and acknowledged. And great pity it is, that it is not more and better considered. It would surely give a check to those licentious thoughts and uncharitable speeches which so much abound.——Do not all men stand in great need of favour and compassion at the hands of God? How comes it then to pass, that they harden their hearts against each other, and will give no quarter? If God *should be extreme to mark what is done amiss*, what would become of the best of us? What mortal could stand such a test, or abide such a trial? And yet in one another we not only *mark*, strictly and severely mark, *what is amiss*; but oftentimes blame what is not amiss, and condemn the most innocent actions. The Scripture declares, that *he shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy*. What then must they expect, who judge and censure their brethren after such a manner, as neither to shew mercy, nor even justice? What folly, what madness must it be, merely for the gratifying of a froward humour, to forfeit the favour of God, and oblige him to *shut up his loving kindness in displeasure*?——Upon the whole, if we desire to be favourably judged, we must take heed how we judge. We are apt to imagine,

that no great ſtreſs will be laid upon ſuch tranſient things as words. But we may eaſily diſcover, that this is a mere deluſion. All ſin is conceived in the heart; and whether it appear in words, or deeds, or neither, we are equally guilty in the ſight of God. Whoever therefore *bridleth not his tongue*, and even curbeth not his thoughts, *that man's religion is vain*. To conclude, if we *deſire life*, and that divine favour which is better than life; it behoves us to *keep our hearts with all diligence*. This will enable us to obſerve with eaſe that direction of the Pſalmiſt: *Keep thy tongue from evil; and thy lips, that they ſpeak no guile.*

S E R M O N XII.

Of Pride and Humility.

JAMES IV. Part of the 6th Verse.

*God resisteth the Proud; but giveth Grace
unto the Humble.*

PRIDE and humility, though the one a vice, and the other a virtue of the first rank, and though the use of the terms be so universally familiar and common, yet seem to be clearly and distinctly understood by very few. The ideas of them, which generally prevail, are partly right, and partly wrong; just in some respects, and erroneous in others. And these errors are not only inconvenient in speculation, but very often inconvenient in life, and injurious to the cause of virtue and religion. Though

the one appears amiable, and the other odious in all men's conceptions; yet to place them in a true light would do them more justice, and at the same time conduce to several good purposes.——I shall therefore endeavour, in discoursing on these words,

First, To describe and fix the characters here spoken of. And,

Secondly, To give some account why God resists the one, and favours the other.

First, Concerning the former I observe, that pride and humility may be considered either as internal or external. *Internal* pride consists in entertaining and cherishing an immoderate and unjust opinion of ourselves, and our own merits, abilities, and perfections; in exalting and extending this favourite idea above and beyond the truth, and swelling it to an undue pitch in our imaginations. Or, in the more emphatical words of scripture, it consists in taking ourselves to be something, when we are nothing; that is, in thinking of ourselves not soberly, but more highly than we ought to think, and stretching of ourselves beyond our measure.——And indeed, so far, the common idea is not

much amiss, but seems conformable to this account. In relation to *humility*, it is often carried too far, and beyond the bounds of reason and truth; if not in practice, yet in notion and conception. It has been judged, that men's thoughts of themselves can never sink too low; never low enough; that, in order to be truly humble, we must renounce all title, and disclaim all pretensions to every thing that is wise and good; acknowledging our best actions, qualities, habits, and dispositions, to be, even in a literal sense, nothing at all, or perhaps worse than nothing; and, whatever we are, or may be; whatever we do, or can do, is altogether vile and odious.——Such a notion of humility as this, instead of raising and recommending, disparages and debases it; instead of representing it in its own genuine and lovely colours, renders it unamiable, disagreeable, dreadful. This is running the virtue into an extreme, and there losing it; whereas the true situation of virtue lies in the middle way between extremes.——

Can it be supposed, that, in order to be humble; a wise man is obliged to think himself a fool, or an honest man a knave? The thing is neither reasonable, nor indeed possible. Wisdom would be no wisdom,

and virtue no virtue, if men could have them, and at the same time know nothing of them. Whoever is possessed of them, must be, in some measure, conscious of his prize. If he magnifies it or over-rates it, then the case is altered, and not to be reconciled with humility; but neither humility, nor any thing else, can disannul plain fact, and falsify men's perceptions.—Since then the humble man is under no obligation to depreciate and debase himself in this manner, nor can do it if he would; what is it that constitutes his true character, and wherein does his humility consist? I answer in the scripture-words before cited, in *thinking soberly of himself, and not more highly than he ought to think*. That is, in judging of himself according to truth, and believing himself to be precisely what he is. For the foundation of this, and every other virtue, is and must be Truth. Here, perhaps, it will be asked, how such an idea, such an estimate as this, can be sufficient to denominate a man humble, and distinguish him as such. The answer is, if a man has a true knowledge of himself, if he is well acquainted with his defects and imperfections, his faults and transgressions, let him be proud if he can. On this supposition

position it is not possible that he should. Low thoughts, and humble ideas, are the necessary consequence of such a knowledge. Hence we find that the vain and the scornful, the proud and the insolent, are commonly said, and indeed very properly, not to know themselves. Whatever they may know or see abroad, they must be ignorant of themselves, and great strangers at home. Every man living might find matter enough in his own breast; blots and blemishes abundantly sufficient to keep him humble, if he would not play tricks with himself; that is, if he would not either wink at them, or throw them out of sight, or dress them up in false colours. So that humility and self-knowledge are closely connected, and indeed inseparable. There is no occasion for any man, nor does religion require it, to sink in his own opinion below the level of truth and justice; much less to be quite ignorant of his own virtue. If this were the case, humility and a good conscience would be inconsistent things; and no spiritual comfort, or virtuous satisfaction, could ever be enjoyed.——However, this concession must be made, and it may be laid down as a reasonable caution, that, in estimating ourselves, we should take aim below the mark;

because our thoughts and opinions of ourselves are naturally and continually mounted by self-love. For this therefore a suitable allowance should always be made. Nevertheless it still holds good, that a true self-knowledge is so far from being inconsistent with humility, that it is the very essence of it.

Having thus briefly inquired into the nature of pride and humility, considered as internal, and seated in the heart; I proceed to give some account of the *external*, which appear and shew themselves in the outward behaviour, and lie open to the observation of the world. And here again popular opinion is subject to err, and be misled by appearances. The inferior part of mankind is apt to look upon all kinds of pomp and grandeur with a suspicious eye; and even to imagine, that some degrees of pride naturally cleave to high ranks and exalted stations. They see the great and the wealthy shining above them in higher spheres; and are too prone to look up at them with jealousy, if not with envy. Sumptuous furniture, splendid entertainments, and rich attire, appear very often in their eyes as marks of pride, and indications of vanity. But this way of judging
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is, at best, weak and ill-grounded. As the distinctions of life ought to be kept up, and order maintained, so, without question, this may be done, and often is done, very innocently. Superiority and pride, dignity and vanity, are quite different things, and should not be rashly confounded. They who are rich in possessions, may nevertheless be *poor in spirit*; and they who are high and great in the world, may yet be low and little in their own eyes. Pride does not consist in observing distinctions, or wearing of ornaments, or *putting on of apparel*; but flows from *the hidden man of the heart*, and breaks out in quite other symptoms. An humble spirit may be concealed under a splendid garb; and so may a proud heart be wrapped up in rags. As humility and pomp are often seen together, so pride and poverty are not always separate. Neither, therefore, of the characters I am speaking of, depends on these things; nor are they to be discovered either by the use of them, or the want of them.——The true indications of both result from men's actions, and appear in their conduct. What I have called external pride, consists in an unsuitable and disproportioned behaviour; that is, an appearance above the level of a man's fortune and condition,

dition, and that station of life in which Providence has placed him : when his actions and pretensions are mismatched ; when he assumes a superior character, and affects to act a part in life that does not belong to him ; when he behaves insolently and arrogantly to those above him, and haughtily and disdainfully to those beneath him : in short, when in word and deed he discovers an aspiring mind, and a heart swelled with ideas of his own worth. And indeed where pride has taken deep root, it seldom fails to shoot up, and shew itself on great variety of occasions. Where the thoughts are thoroughly possessed, they easily communicate a strong tincture both to words and actions. The very air and mien, looks and gestures, do not always escape the infection. Ostentation becomes natural, and the marks of self-esteem are spread through the whole appearance. The principle which lies at the root not only supplies and nourishes the stem, but shoots up into every branch, and feeds every twig. Hence the behaviour seldom fails to be full of blossom, how little soever the fruit may answer.——On the other hand, humility appears, when it does appear, quite otherwise ; and its signs and tokens are just the reverse. It disposes men
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to seem only what they are, or less, and to frame their behaviour in conformity to their condition and station in life: to act the very part which Providence has allotted them, contentedly and thankfully, without noise and parade, affectation and tumour. It inspires them with a just respect and deference to superiors, and an easy condescension to inferiors; makes them full of candour towards others, and of diffidence in themselves; destroys the very seeds of presumption, and plucks up confidence by the roots; not only sets a guard on men's thoughts and imaginations, but governs their very words, and seals up their lips. In short, let it suffice to say, in the description of this amiable virtue, that equity is its parent, and a whole train of virtues and graces its genuine offspring.—Having thus given a short account of the two opposite characters in my text, I proceed, in the

Second place, To give some account, as I proposed, why God resists the former, and encourages the latter. And surely this must be very easy and obvious, from the odious nature of the one, and the intrinsic worth and excellence of the other. We read in scripture, that every one that is proud in
heart

heart is an abomination to the Lord. And so he must needs be on several accounts; more especially the two following: First, as he is an enemy to truth, God's essential attribute, and most sacred perfection; in the maintenance of which, among all rational creatures, his glory consists. Now pride is a direct violation of it from first to last; not only in its conception and formation, but in its after-growth, and through every stage of its progress. The very foundation of it is laid in falsehood. The proud man conceives himself to be what he is not; and takes all imaginable pains to fix and rivet the lie within his own breast. He constantly misrepresents himself to himself, and endeavours to do it to all about him. He magnifies every good quality, and winks at every bad one, hereby forming a character in his own imagination, which no way belongs to him.—In like manner, his actions, his professions, his demeanor in general, are a continuation of falsehood and a scene of fraud. He assumes those honours and regards which he has no right to; puts in false claims, and exhibits counterfeit titles. In short, he acts, as it were, a fictitious part in life; deludes whom he can, and is, at least, an impostor in the sight of God.—And as he

he violates truth, so he breaks in upon the order of the world. As far as men are able to judge, the perfection of the universe consists in those ranks and degrees, distinctions and subordinations, which appear throughout, from the top of the visible creation to the bottom ; and, in all probability, are carried on likewise through the invisible creation above us. By gentle steps, and regular species, the chain is continued from the meanest reptile up to man ; and from man through a range of superior beings, immortal spirits, powers and principalities, far beyond the reach of our highest conceptions. And not only the several species of creatures, but the several individuals of the same species have their degrees and distinctions, providentially ordained and preserved, not only to answer the ends of order and regularity, but a great variety of others both moral and natural. Thus we find it is among mankind, not only in respect of their natural powers and perfections, but their ranks, stations and conditions of life. And even to us it is manifest, that such a dispensation is not only just and beautiful in itself, but highly fitting and commodious, and even necessary, to promote the various purposes of life.—Now, to oppose this
divine

divine regulation, this beneficial order ; to break in upon it, obstruct it, or any way interfere with it, cannot but be highly offensive to the great Governor of the world, who appointed it from the beginning, and *poured it over all his works.* Since it was his will to ordain it, it must be his will to have it maintained and preserved ; and by consequence all invasions of it, or oppositions to it, may be considered as acts of direct rebellion against Heaven. And is not this manifestly the case of pride, discontent, envy, and ambition ? those infernal vices, and the darling daughters of *Lucifer !* Did they not work his fall, and from a glorious angel of light transform him to a devil ? Was it any wonder, that God should resist his pride, and confound his ambition, which prompted him to rebel against the Most High, and withstand his righteous decrees ? that the Almighty should *punish the stout heart* of this grand apostate, and bring down *the glory of his high looks ?* The same crime in man is, in proportion, equally odious and impious ; and therefore incurs a proportionable displeasure, and will receive a suitable punishment. Nay, in some respect it stands charged with a peculiar aggravation. *Pride was not made for man,* as the royal preacher observes.

observes. That is, he has so many blots in his character, so many infirmities to acknowledge, so many sins and follies to answer for, that it may seem strange how or which way pride could ever steal into his heart, or even enter into his thoughts. If angels might be dazzled by the lustre of their own perfections, yet surely this is not man's case. Can pride kindle in corruption, or a flame of ambition break out of sinful dust and ashes? *We* aspire to great things; and glory in our strength and worth, who are a kin to the very worms, and destined for their prey! Can so low, so humble a condition, be a proper soil for pride and vanity, arrogance and ambition?——But to return; since the proud man violates the order of the creation, disturbs the harmony of the world, and resists the ordinances of Heaven; it naturally follows, in truth and righteousness, that God will *resist* him, and, sooner or later, effectually humble him.

On the other hand, the reason is no less manifest, why he should *give grace to the humble*, in whatever sense the expression be understood. If we mean by it his general favour and encouragement, and the blessings thence arising, the thing can admit of no doubt. What more proper object of his favour?

favour? What more amiable, more excellent in itself? Humility and charity ever shine with a peculiar lustre, and are eminently precious in the sight of God. If any graces in the soul of man are fit to be transplanted into the regions above, it must be these; which therefore will not only find a place in paradise, but be preserved in perpetual bloom, and flourish for ever. Humility must ever be a proper object of divine regard, as being essential to the heavenly state, as well as most becoming and lovely in itself. Amidst the numberless orders and degrees of the blessed, what enjoyment could there be for the proud, envious, and ambitious, supposing them admitted? Their restless minds would extract misery out of joy, and turn concord into confusion. But no difference of condition, no higher advantages, or superior glories, will ever disturb the humble-minded, or diminish their happiness. Perfectly satisfied with their own portion of bliss, they will look above them without regret, and view the whole scene with perfect complacency. And yet, perhaps, among their own species, not many will be found above them. For gloriously will they be exalted in that day, and distinguished in a most signal manner. Their hu-
mility

mility shall be crowned with honour, and their self-abasement lift them up. God will abundantly favour them, and in the most conspicuous instances manifest his esteem. In a word, they will find that pre-eminence which they never sought, and be glorified publicly in the sight of men and angels.—

Again, if by God's *giving grace to the humble*, be understood the aids and assistance of his holy spirit, conferred in a larger measure; this is also fact, and very easy to be accounted for. As humility renders the mind peculiarly susceptible of the best impressions, and naturally qualifies it for virtuous improvement; so it more especially entitles it to the succours of Heaven, and the influences of divine grace. On many accounts it is best fitted for the residence and habitation of God's holy spirit; which *dwells*, and delights to dwell, *with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit*.

Upon the whole, it is every way manifest, that humility is a most powerful recommendation to the favour of God; who is ever best pleased with what most conduces to the perfection of his creatures, and the good of the whole. And certain it is, that nothing tends more, either to the peace and prosperity of the public, or the happiness of individuals.

individuals. Nothing is more favourable and friendly to society, or better suited to the order and good government of the world. Strong is the bias of self-love, and very powerful are all its affections. To govern these, and keep them within the bounds of reason and truth, as it is a conquest glorious in itself, and productive of the greatest benefits to mankind, so it must needs be a sacrifice highly well pleasing in the sight of God.—I shall conclude in the words of our blessed Saviour, the greatest patron of humility, and the noblest pattern of it that ever lived: *Blessed, says he, are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.* And, as if this were not sufficient, he further assures us, that *he who humbleth himself as a little child, the same shall be greatest in the kingdom of Heaven.*

S E R M O N XIII.

Of Revenge.

R O M. XII. 19.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath : for it is written, vengeance is mine ; I will repay, saith the Lord.

THOUGH there be no law, divine or human, against the prevention of injuries, or against the vindication of men's rights, properties, and privileges ; yet natural religion disallows, and the christian religion strictly forbids, all revenge and retaliation. To guard against wrongs, or redress them when done, is so reasonable in itself, and, if men stop there, so inoffensive ; it is, moreover, so natural a privilege, and so essentially necessary to their well-being, that there seems to be no room for the prohibition of it, or

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even to question its consistence with the purest morality in the world. But redressing of wrongs, and revenging them, are quite different things, though too often confounded in practice. To defend ourselves, we have all manner of right ; but none at all to be judges in our own cause, and to punish evil-doers as we think fit. Whatever grounds we may have to demand justice, or seek reparation ; yet it behoves us to consider, what my text informs us, and the whole tenour of Scripture confirms, that *vengeance is not ours* ; and therefore we must not pretend to *repay* ; must not attempt to *return evil for evil*, whatever injuries or provocations we may have received.

By *giving place unto wrath*, we are not to understand a cession or submission to the violent attempts of injurious men, as some have interpreted the words ; for it is not the *wrath* of *man* that is here meant, but the *wrath* of *God*, as plainly appears from the reason annexed. The true meaning therefore of the Apostle's direction is manifestly this : when you are injured, think not of retaliating ; but refer yourself and your cause to the righteous Governor of the world, to whom *vengeance belongeth*, and who will not

fail to make such retribution as truth and justice require.

That vengeance is due to evil-doers, the Apostle is so far from denying, that his words plainly imply it, and his doctrine is built on that very foundation. That injustice and villainy, injuries and outrages, are things of ill-desert; that they necessarily infer guilt, and by consequence render men obnoxious to punishment, are points universally known and confessed. That they who do evil ought to suffer evil, supposing no satisfaction made, is an eternal truth, rooted in the very natures of things, and obvious to all understandings.

—The question therefore is not, whether vengeance ought to be executed on evil-doers; but by whom? More particularly in the case before us, whether by the persons themselves who are aggrieved and wronged, or by the supreme and universal Judge? And this we find decided in my text; which removes it entirely out of the hands of the former, and appropriates it to the latter. *Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.*

—In order to discover the grounds of this decision, I shall consider it,

First, In respect of men, who are forbidden,

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in a private capacity especially, to execute vengeance on one another.

Secondly, In relation to God, who expressly claims and appropriates to himself the execution of vengeance as his sacred prerogative.

First, Concerning men, it will be sufficient to shew, that they are neither commissioned, nor qualified, to interpose in this matter. Had they any such commission, they must have received it from above: but no such commission appears; nor do we find any instance of the delegation of such an authority. I am here speaking of private Christians; though, in some sense, the limitation is needless. For even the authority of the civil magistrate is by no means of the same kind with that we are considering. His province is to guard the community, and protect his people as well as he can, from injuries foreign and domestic; and, when committed, to redress them as much as may be, and make use of all just and proper means to prevent them for the future. These are the ends of his office, and the grounds of its institution, and, by consequence, the measure of his authority. But this is not the retribution spoken of in my text; to which offenders are still obnoxious, notwithstanding
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any penalties inflicted on them by the magistrate. Many crimes are not cognizable by the civil power ; partly as they belong not to his office and jurisdiction, and partly as they are, in a great measure, undiscoverable by him. And even of those which come under his inspection, and are within the bounds of his province, he can only judge very imperfectly, and, by consequence, not inflict adequate punishments. Such judgments and such punishments are to be received at another, and a higher tribunal. In the mean time, it is sufficient for human rulers to deal with criminals in such a manner, as tends most to the protection of society, and may strike *a terror into evil-doers*. Further than this the power of human legislators cannot extend ; and therefore, properly speaking, *vengeance is not theirs*. And if not theirs, much less can it be ascribed to private men, who have no pretension, no colour for any such commission.

We may go on to observe, that as they are not commissioned, so neither are they qualified to *avenge themselves*. Nay, they are actually disqualified in several respects. — Supposing we were allowed to punish the injurious, and to return evil for evil ; by what rule would we proceed ? Ought we not to have a

strict regard to the degrees of their demerit, and the measure of their guilt? Without this we could not be capable of inflicting punishment in due proportion. And yet this is quite above our reach. We are, and must be, entirely ignorant of many circumstances, whereon depends the nature of men's actions; and which greatly conduce to mitigate their wrongs, and extenuate their guilt. What appears outwardly, and passes before our eyes, that we perceive; but the internal springs of action, the hidden thoughts, and secret purposes, and real motives, are out of our sight; and however we may search, and inquire, and examine, we are forced to sit down with mere conjectures. Has any man done us wrong? Perhaps he never meant it; or, if he did mean it, perhaps it proves much heavier than he intended. It may be he was drawn into the commission of it inadvertently, hastily, and through a sudden surprise, or by the instigation of some powerful passion. These, and many other circumstances of the like nature, ought to be known by us fully and distinctly, in order to judge the offender, and compute the measure of his crime. Without such a knowledge we could never pass a just sentence; and might perhaps commit greater wrongs, in the execution of our sentence, than we had
ever

ever received. But such a knowledge we neither have, nor are we capable of it; and by consequence are destitute of a most essential qualification.——Another disability arises from that self-bias, that strong partiality in his own favour, which are natural to the mind of man. Hence it is that we are perpetually disposed to magnify very much every wrong that is done us, which generally appears high and heinous on that very account. Whereas, had it been directed elsewhere, it might have been judged by us very inconsiderable; and perhaps we should scarcely have seen it, if we had not felt it. Very small offences are swelled into grievous injuries and monstrous indignities, merely by being viewed through the glass of self-love. And yet when we have committed injuries ourselves, we readily turn the other end of the perspective, and diminish them almost into nothing. Supposing then that we were licensed to retaliate wrongs, and be our own avengers; it is easy to see what would be the consequences of such a partiality. Whatever evils we received, we should be apt to return double and treble, and punish every aggressor beyond all bounds of equity and proportion: especially considering the additional influence of passion, which would probably

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operate

operate at the same time, and push the revenge still further. If we followed the first impulse, and took counsel of our anger, as we should be prompted to do, were we allowed to avenge ourselves; what room would there be to expect from us either mercy, or moderation, or justice? In order to discover the real demerit of injurious actions, they ought to be considered by us coolly and sedately; their circumstances to be weighed, and their principles fairly examined. But is it likely that men should take such steps, or stay to deliberate sufficiently, when provoked into rage? Or that they should think to any good purpose, when they are scarce capable of thinking at all? Would not vengeance, if committed to the trust of passionate mortals, appear like a weapon in a madman's hands? A weapon ready to be employed on all occasions, just as anger directed and indignation prompted. If men avenged themselves during the first heats of resentment, they would punish in the dark, and retaliate at random, running very often into all the lengths and excesses of blind fury. And supposing it delayed, through want of opportunity; if it fermented in the breast, till at length it subsided in hatred and ill-will, the consequence might be as mischievous, and the evils returned
more

more durable. In short, as the *wrath of man worketh not righteousness* and justice, but always obstructs it, well may we conclude ourselves, on this account likewise, unfit for the exercise of such a power, and the execution of such a trust.

But though, as appears, we are neither authorized nor qualified for this purpose; and can never attempt it without an invasion of the divine prerogative; yet since we are too often guilty of such a presumption, in opposition to all law, both divine and human, it may not be improper to shew briefly, that as we have no right in the case, so neither have we any just pretence to transgress in this particular. And indeed reason is so far from countenancing it, that it condemns it utterly on several accounts.——Are we eager and forward to call offenders to an account, and punish those that have wronged us with severity and rigour? Certainly we ought to be well assured of our own innocence. If, on the contrary, we are guilty, and have frequently trespassed against our neighbour in word or in deed, must we not desire and stand in need ourselves, of clemency, indulgence, and forgiveness? Can any thing then be more contrary to reason and equity, than strictly to execute vengeance on others, while

at the same time we are deprecating that which is due to ourselves? Are we not quite shameless, as well as unjust, if we refuse to deal with others by the same rule and measure that we ask and expect in our own case?— But further; though we had never done any wrong, and yet received much; still revenge would be most unreasonable. For however we may have been injured, what reparation, what benefit, could we propose to ourselves merely by returning the evil? To seek redress, where it fairly can be had, is agreeable to our interest, as well as to equity: but what are we profited by making men suffer for suffering sake? The utmost that can be alleged in this case is, that we hereby gratify a certain passion; but it is a corrupt, unnatural passion, and, instead of promoting our happiness, tends to destroy it. It is the voice of nature and reason, as well as of religion, that the communication of good is better in itself, absolutely better, than the production of evil. And this holds eternally true, in respect of our enemies, as well as our friends. Whatever their demerits may be, however injurious they have been; yet to contribute to their misery purposefully and wilfully, is an action always vile, unreasonable and detestable. It is not only losing our labour, as no good can possibly come of it; but

but it is acting a diabolical part, and defeating, as far as in us lies, the great end of the creation.——In confirmation of this we may further consider, that the practice of revenge is highly detrimental to ourselves, and pernicious to the public. It robs men of the peace and tranquillity of their minds; introduces such dispositions, and cherishes such passions, as are the bane of all true happiness. It plucks up by the roots those virtues and graces, which are the perfection of our minds, and the glory of our nature; and, instead of them, plants and nourishes such rancorous affections as naturally and necessarily lead to the worst kind of misery. And as it privately poisons the breast of those that encourage it; so it is publicly most injurious, pestilent, and fatal. It weakens authority, undermines government, and tends directly to dissolve all civil and social obligations. As far as it prevails, it reduces men, I will not say to a state of nature, but to a wild, lawless, and brutal condition; promoting and perpetuating strife and contention, broils and quarrels, barbarity and bloodshed. In short, it corrupts society to that degree, as to render it a curse instead of a blessing; and, if it generally took place, would produce such disquiet, disorder, and confusion, as to make solitudes and desarts a more

more desirable situation.——This might be shewn, and set forth at large; but I hasten to the

Second thing proposed; namely, To consider *vengeance*, and the execution thereof, as God's peculiar prerogative, which he asserts and appropriates in my text: *vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*——We have already seen, that, in our hands, it is folly in the design, madness in the execution, and misery in the event. We turn it into rage and revenge, and render it altogether unworthy of a rational agent. But in God's hands it is perfect reason and unerring wisdom; it is justice and righteousness mingled with mercy, and founded on eternal truth. He reconciles it with clemency, lenity, and long suffering; with infinite benevolence, and boundless compassion.——His right to govern the world, and execute sentence on evil-doers, is founded not only on creation, and the relation thence arising; but on his infinite perfections, natural and moral, which qualify him, in all respects, for authority and dominion, and constitute him, without a rival, *the only potentate*, and universal judge. As he hath full power to *do whatsoever he pleaseth in heaven and in earth*, and to *subdue all things to himself*,

himself, nothing being able to *resist his will*, or interrupt his counsels ; so his knowledge and wisdom, his justice and goodness, are entirely answerable. If men, as we have seen, are disqualified to execute vengeance by ignorance, partiality, and passion, God is not only absolutely free from such impediments, but possesses, in the highest degree that is possible, those powers and perfections which are the very reverse thereof.—His *knowledge* is without bounds, reaching and piercing through the whole universe. All the actions of his creatures lie *naked and open before him*. He *seeth in secret*, and *darkness hideth not from him*. His eyes are in every place, *beholding the evil and the good*. He *searcheth all hearts*, and *understandeth all imaginations*. Every principle, every purpose, every motive that enters into the mind of man, or stirs in his thoughts, is by *Him* clearly seen, and exactly comprehended. He views the very formation of sin, and the first conceptions of iniquity ; knows the strength of every desire, and the force of temptation ; beholds the workings of affection, the operations of instinct, and the kindlings of passion ; is perfectly acquainted with the precise measure and proportion of each man's knowledge, his abilities, opportunities ; the degrees of
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the resistance or compliance of the will ; what endeavours are used and exerted, and what means are neglected and omitted, in the whole conduct of the mind, and the course of its actions. In short, not the least movement in the heart of man can be concealed or covered from God's all-searching eye, who is absolute and perpetual *light, without any darkness at all*. Hence he must needs be, in all cases, possessed of the fullest and clearest evidence ; and, by consequence, so far thoroughly qualified to judge his creatures.—Consider we then, in the next place, his justice and righteousness, which both reason and revelation assure us, is without allay and without blemish: Of all *passions* he is entirely void ; his whole attention and regard being fixed on the directions of right reason, and the dictates of truth. On the same account he can have no temptation, no inducement to *partiality* ; since he must ever approve and disapprove by the rule of right, and the real worth or demerit of his creatures. Accordingly the Scripture every where represents him in this light ; repeatedly assuring us, that *God is no respecter of persons ; that he accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor ; for they are all the work of his hands*. Whether he be high or low, conspicuous

ous or obscure, no man can be in danger of divine vengeance without real guilt and certain iniquity. On the other hand, wherever there is vice and villany obstinate and incorrigible, *though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.* No power can secure him, no honours or dignities protect him, no riches buy him off. According to his works shall he infallibly be judged, without any regard to rank or worldly distinction.— Lastly, as God is omniscient, and supremely just, so he is also of great goodness, which *endureth continually.* He is *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* His justice is tempered with mercy, and mingled with loving-kindness. That is, he is not severe nor rigorous, not *extreme to mark what is done amiss*; but *patiently waiteth, that he may be gracious*; and those that sincerely reform, he will most *abundantly pardon.* Wherever there is room for it, he is well pleased to withhold his vengeance; and in every case makes all possible allowances that right and truth will admit. He knows our frame, remembers our frailties, and weighs our infirmities, never expecting to *reap where he has not sown, or requiring beyond what he has given.*—Certainly then, a Being endued with such powers and perfections is
thoroughly

thoroughly fitted to govern the world, and judge its inhabitants ; to punish the impious and disobedient, and execute vengeance on evil-doers. And execute it he will, in righteousness to all ; in mercy to such as are objects of mercy. And thus he will proceed, distinguishing finally the righteous and the wicked, not only to promote the ends of government, but in order to the perpetual maintenance and manifestation of right and truth. This reason requires, and herein his glory truly consists, as well as the common interest of all rational creatures.

The sum of the foregoing doctrine is, that men ought not to think of avenging themselves when injured, as having neither authority nor capacity to execute it ; or any just grounds to desire or endeavour it : but that the great Governor of the world, to whom vengeance belongeth, and who is possessed of all powers and perfections, is fully capable of this divine province, and will, on the justest grounds, and in the most equitable measures, *repay* the wrongs and crimes of his creatures ; that truth and righteousness may finally prevail, and flourish for ever.—What remains then, but that human wrath *give place* to divine ; and that whenever and however he may be aggrieved, we cheerfully refer every thing to
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to this all-perfect judge; who is able and willing to redress all wrongs in his due time.— I shall only add, that, however men may injure or trespass against one another, we are all such heinous offenders against God, that we have much more reason to employ ourselves in supplicating his mercy and pardon, than in seeking vengeance against our fellow-creatures. Dare we hope for his forgiveness, while we are meditating mischief for them, and forming schemes of revenge? Our hope will surely be cut off; and we shall incur the doom pronounced by the Apostle: *He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.*

[illegible]

S E R M O N XIV.

Christianity, and its Author, vindicated from
Calumny.

LUKE VII. 35.

But Wisdom is justified of all her children.

THE austerities of *John the Baptist*, and *Christ's* humanity, gentleness, and condescension, were alike disagreeable to the malicious *Jews*; and they put a construction upon both equally perverse; as we find in the two preceding verses. *John the Baptist*, says our Saviour to them, *came neither eating bread, nor drinking wine, and ye say he hath a devil.*—*The Son of Man* is come eating and drinking, and ye say, *Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.* Then follow the words

of my text: *But Wisdom is justified of all her children.*——A small ambiguity in the original renders it somewhat uncertain, whether these words are to be looked upon as a continuation of the *Jewish* cavil, or whether they contain *Christ's* reply thereto.——

According to the most common, and, as it seems, most natural interpretation, our Saviour animadverts upon the foregoing objections; as if he had said, Though many of the *Jews* are so froward and foolish, as to dislike the appearance, and censure the proceedings of me, as well as my fore-runner; yet the fitness and reasonableness thereof is and will be discerned by all wise men: by all who are so wise as to lay aside prejudice and partiality, and seek the truth, in the love thereof, with simplicity and sincerity. As this sense of the words appears, in a more especial manner, worthy of the speaker, and offers no violence to the original; it seems to have been preferred, and commonly received upon good grounds. Without regard therefore to such other constructions as the words may admit, I shall confine myself to this, and consider the observation contained in them,

First, With respect to that calumny of
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the *Jews*, which more immediately occasioned it.

Secondly, In relation to Christianity in general, to which it may very fitly be extended and applied.

First, I am to consider the observation with respect to that calumny of the *Jews*, which more immediately occasioned it. Our blessed Saviour, probably for such reasons as I am going to mention, did not think fit to conduct himself, in his behaviour among men, by those rigorous and severe rules which *John the Baptist* followed. And if he had, he had still incurred censure and reproach, as *John* did before him. But he chose to converse among men in a more humane and familiar manner; with gentleness and affability; not shunning public societies, but mingling indifferently, as occasion required, with all degrees and distinctions of men. He did not affect any needless singularities, but readily complied with any innocent customs he met with. And this sociable disposition, this complacency of behaviour, the perverse *Jews* misconstrued so far as to tax our blessed Saviour with levity and licentiousness. But how groundless was the charge! Had the design of his

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coming into the world been to patronize the sect of the *Pharisees*, and to propagate *their* righteousness, it would indeed have been hard to account for the conduct we are speaking of. But his views and intentions were widely different.—He never intended to set men an example of pride and arrogance, unsociableness and inhumanity, or to inspire them with a contempt of their fellow-creatures. It was no part of his design to loosen the bands of society, to alienate the hearts of mankind, and set them at distance from one another. On the contrary, his aim was to unite, to reconcile, to endear them to each other: to make them kind and benevolent, courteous and tender-hearted; to strengthen society, to promote universal good-will, and knit mankind together by all the ties of love and charity. And, during his stay upon earth, he constantly both taught and practised accordingly. Those affable compliances and condescensions therefore, for which the *Jews* reviled him, were only exercises of humanity, and instances of that good-will towards men, which in him was universal, and which he endeavoured to promote and propagate in others, by all possible methods. In this, as well as all other branches of his

his conduct, he set mankind an excellent pattern; a pattern that might and ought to have civilized the very *Pharisees* themselves, had their hearts been susceptible of any impressions of humanity.——But further; though our Saviour (as we find) occasionally withdrew from the crowd, and retreated into privacy, thereby setting men also an example of religious retirement; yet his main business was to be transacted in public. He came to reform the world, and teach men their duty; a work by no means consistent with constant solitude. On the contrary, it obliged him to appear abroad much and often, to frequent places of public resort, and even to seek occasions of conversing with all sorts of men. And that he might find a readier way into their minds and understandings, and prepare them for the reception of his doctrines, it was also requisite that he should take proper methods of gaining their affections. And how could this be more effectually done than by those gracious compliances, and that obliging demeanor, which gave occasion to the *Jewish* slander? Nothing is more popular, nothing more engaging, than a willing conformity to the common usages and customs of men. And accordingly this

has ever been practised and recommended by the wiser part of mankind, in relation to all such customs, as are neither condemned by any law, or contradicted by right reason. Nor can this justly be thought any way unworthy even of so divine a person as our blessed Saviour, especially considering those great and good ends which he had in view. — Again, as the doctrines which our Saviour had to teach, so the miracles which he had to work in confirmation of them, made it necessary for him to appear much in public, and that upon various occasions; for by this means he had more frequent opportunities of manifesting his divine power, and that in such a manner as was most agreeable to his gracious intentions. *He went about doing good*, not only to the souls of men, but also to their bodies; thereby doubly proving his mission from heaven, in displaying divine goodness, as well as power. In pursuance of these ends, it was necessary for him to be often with the multitude, and to converse with men publicly at all times and seasons. And by being present with them, even at the hours of refreshment, he found fit opportunities both of working miracles, and conferring sundry kinds of benefits. He seasoned and sanctified

fied their food with his heavenly instructions, and, when they wanted food, made a miraculous provision for them.—But they further objected to him, his conversations with publicans and sinners. Which objection needs no other answer than what our Saviour himself has been pleased to give it: *They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.* An unexceptionable answer, even supposing those ideas were just which the objectors had conceived, either of the publicans or of themselves. But indeed the *Pharisees* seem to have wanted the assistance of the great physician of souls, no less than the publicans. And if greater regard was shewn to these than those, the reason is plain. The one were humble and tractable, the other proud and perverse: the one conscious of their own unworthiness, the other puffed up with a groundless conceit of extraordinary merit. In a word, the one capable of reformation, the other in a great measure incapable.—Thus it appears how little reason there was for that charge, to which my text is an answer. The wisdom of our Saviour's conduct would not fail to be justified by all that were truly wise, howsoever it might be condemned by the foolish.—But I proceed,

Secondly, To consider the declaration in my
text

text abstractedly from that which was the occasion of it, and to extend and apply it to the reception of Christianity. And without doubt it is justly applicable thereto: it does indeed hold true of all manner of wisdom, and therefore is generally expressed; and might be considered and treated of accordingly. But to nothing can it so fitly and properly be applied as the Christian religion (not only as it was spoken by the Author of it, but also and chiefly) because it was purely the unwillingness of the *Jews* to acknowledge *Christ* and embrace his doctrine, that made them seek out for such cavils and objections as we have been considering. It is probable therefore our Saviour had an eye to this in the answer he made them, and accordingly laid down such an observation as implied a condemnation of their infidelity.—That low and humble condition wherein *Christ* appeared was so contrary to the wishes and sentiments of the *Jews*, that many of them could not bear the thoughts of his being the *Messiah*, and seemed resolved to reject him at any rate. They had set their hearts upon a quite different person; even one who, according to their imaginations, was to come among them with great pomp, power, and dignity; subdue their enemies, restore their liberty, and re-

establish their government. From *Christ* they neither did nor could expect any thing of this, in a literal sense ; and therefore set themselves against him with all their might, and all their malice. And as the humility of our Saviour's appearance was the great objection and impediment in his life-time, so was his crucifixion afterwards ; and that not only to the *Jews*, but even to the *Gentiles*. For thus we find, that *Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness* ; the latter taking offence at it, as well as the former.—But had either the one or the other been the children of wisdom ; had they been as wise in reality as they affected to be in appearance, they would certainly have had very different sentiments. They would not only have justified the Christian dispensation, but have admired and adored the wisdom by which it was conducted. Had the great Lawgiver of mankind assumed the form of a prince, according to the inclinations of the *Jews* ; or that of a philosopher, as the *Gentiles* seemed rather to imagine and desire, the Christian faith had wanted one of the strongest foundations on which it rests. Hereby colour would have been given its enemies to object, that, in the one case, the success of it was

was owing to secular power and authority; and, in the other, to the arts of human eloquence, and the prevalence of learning. —Whereas, according to the method that was really chosen, it is evident that it was not of men, but of God, by whose power and protection it spread and prospered, amidst all the disadvantages it laboured under. Our Saviour not only thought fit to appear himself in the manner above-mentioned, but chose for his apostles men of the lowest station, and destitute of all those gifts and talents, which, humanly speaking, were requisite for the accomplishment of their great work. Nevertheless they succeeded in a most astonishing manner, thereby giving the world unquestionable assurance of the truth of the gospel, and the divinity of its Author.

The evidences of Christianity were not only then, but still are, and ever will be, abundantly satisfactory to all wise men; nor can modern unbelievers any more justify their unbelief than the infidels of old. Those testimonies whereon we rely, though not equal to the evidence of sense, yet cannot fail of satisfying all impartial men. The swift progress and propagation of the gospel under the greatest disadvantages, and amidst all the difficulties

difficulties and discouragements that can be thought of; as it is a proof of the truth of the gospel, which the first Christians only lived to see the beginning of, so it may be looked upon as almost equivalent to those evidences of sense which they enjoyed; as a standing and perpetual miracle, which, together with the accomplishment of certain prophecies, was to remain visible throughout all ages, and be a never-failing confirmation of the truth of Christianity. I have not time to enlarge on this copious subject, and shall therefore only offer the following consideration, to shew the great reasonableness and wisdom of believing.—Either God has revealed his will to mankind, or he has not. If he has revealed it, even a deist will not deny but it is contained in the gospel, as knowing this to be upon all accounts infinitely superior to any other religion on earth that is pretended to have come from heaven. He will readily grant, that if he was to receive any revelation, it would be this, as appearing to him more worthy of God, and, by consequence, more likely to have come from him than any other that he ever heard of.—On the other hand, should it prove true that God has *not* revealed his will to mankind; yet upon this hard supposition, a good Christian

Christian is secure at least. For if there is no revelation, then the only true religion must be the light of nature, and the reason of men's own minds. Now the Christian religion is so perfectly agreeable thereto, that a good Christian, in proportion to his goodness, must have as well-grounded hopes, and as fair a prospect as any man upon earth. All the difference would be, that he has been mistaken as to certain matters of fact, which were no hindrance at all to the doing of his duty; so far from it, that they were a great furtherance to it. Thus we see a good Christian is secure, even supposing his faith erroneous. But of this there is no danger at all. The proofs of our faith are so clear and full, that, if they fail us, our faculties are not to be trusted.

Having thus briefly considered the proposition in my text with respect to the belief of Christianity, it may not improperly be applied also to the practice of it. For though this be our highest and greatest wisdom; yet has it very many adversaries, who are ready to object against it upon all occasions. Many, who acknowledge the wisdom of believing in *Christ*, are yet insensible of the wisdom of obeying him; though he himself has assured them that the former avails nothing without the

the latter. When men are once in bondage to their sinful lusts, and sensual inclinations, their understandings are darkened and depraved, and they become blind to their own true interest. Their own evil *ways seem right to them, though the end thereof be the ways of death.* They cannot, nor will they discover any wisdom in denying themselves present satisfactions, for the sake of such advantages as are future and invisible. Their wisdom is to mind this world, and make the most of it, without troubling themselves about another. And if they be told, that virtue and religion conduce more than any thing even to the happiness of this life, they can believe and conceive nothing of it.—The sensual man can relish nothing but the delights of sense, and persuades himself it is the wisest thing he can do to take his fill of them. To tell him of the pleasures and benefits of temperance and regularity, is to speak to him in a language that he does not understand.—In like manner, tell the unjust man of the wisdom of integrity, and the folly of fraud; tell him, that those crooked paths, wherein he is engaged, lead to his ruin; and that, how plausible and profitable soever they may seem at present, they will prove pernicious in the end, he will give no credit to any such words, but
perhaps

perhaps receive them with derision.—And the like may be said of any other kind of wickedness into which men have plunged themselves.—In short, virtue has no charms in the eyes of wicked men, how amiable soever it may be in itself. Their minds are so corrupt, that folly appears wisdom to them, and wisdom folly.

But, however it be with these men, the wisdom of religion is justified of all her children. The virtuous and religious man is perfectly convinced that he has chosen the better part. His innocence and his virtue yield him much greater and truer satisfaction than can possibly be met with in the ways of vice and sin. They perpetually fill his breast with the most substantial comforts, and give him that peace and tranquillity of mind which the world can neither give nor take away. That conquest which he has gained over his lusts and passions is preferable in his sight to the most boundless liberty; and he finds it infinitely better to let his reason bear rule, than to follow the swing of his appetites and inclinations. He is so far from thinking it a slavery to confine himself to the rules of right reason and religion, that he believes and acknowledges it to be the most perfect freedom.—He knows he is permitted a

sober and wise use of the good things of this world ; but he will not give them his heart, nor set his affections on them ; much less will he make use of any unjust methods to obtain them. Not all the wit of man can convince him that there is any folly in honesty, or any wisdom in craft. He believes that men lose more than they get by the arts of fraud and falsehood ; and should they gain the whole world by them, yet he considers *how little they would be profited, if they lost their own souls*. In short, as he believes wickedness every way destructive ; so he doubts not but *godliness is profitable for all things*. But the chief ground of that satisfaction which redounds to him from the discharge of his duty, is his consciousness of the favour of God, and his expectation of those inestimable rewards to which he is entitled. He looks forward into futurity, not only without fear, but with joy and confidence. In a word, he thoroughly approves the choice he has made, and his conscience is ever congratulating him upon that account. And if he be thus pleased and satisfied here, what will he be hereafter ? Though the observation in my text be (as we have seen) undoubtedly true in this world, yet it will be in a most remarkable manner verified in the next. How much virtue is

superior to vice, every wise man perceives, even at present, in a good measure; but at the last day he will be more abundantly sensible of it. The wisdom of righteousness and virtue will then be publicly justified in the sight of men and angels. Heaven and Earth will resound with the praises of it, and the Judge of all the earth will applaud it openly in the most distinguishing manner. How will the good man be then transported with the sense of his own happy condition! With what joy and exultation will he behold Virtue triumphant, and Vice hang down her head! On the other hand, with what shame and confusion of face will the wicked and dissolute appear! *When they see, (according to the words of the son of Sirach) the righteous stand in great boldness before the face of such as made no account of his labours.—When they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation.—And they repenting, and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, this is he whom we sometimes had in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We, fools, accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints!*

We may gather from what has been said, that

that the sentiments of the generality are by no means to be depended on. We see the *children of wisdom* are appealed to, as the only proper judges of wisdom. And since it is but too evident, that a great majority of mankind cannot pretend to that character, it must be very improper, and very unsafe, to trust to their notions. Common persuasions and prevailing opinions are very often erroneous. It is not therefore by these, but by the judgments and practices of wise men that we are to be directed.

We may also learn from hence, that a virtuous man has no reason to be discouraged upon the account of those calumnies and reproaches which wicked men may throw upon him. He has the approbation of all wise men, and that is abundantly sufficient to counterbalance the censures of the foolish. If our blessed Saviour himself could not escape the stroke of evil tongues, surely none of his followers will wonder at the like treatment. When we consider how inoffensive, how amiable, how excellent virtue is in itself, it may seem strange it should ever meet with any enemies. But then we are to consider withal, that wicked men behold it with distempered eyes and depraved understandings.—However, it plainly appears from

260 *Christianity, and its Author, vindicated.*

our Saviour's own observation, that these are not to be looked upon as competent judges ; and therefore a good man has, upon that account, no reason to be solicitous either about their praise or dispraise. He is sure of the esteem of wise men, and moreover of approving himself in the sight of God and his own conscience ; and further than this, his ambition neither does nor ought to reach. To conclude ; Let the opposition and *contradiction of sinners* be what it will in this life ; yet by a patient continuance in well-doing, he seeks, and will surely find, glory, honour, and immortality, in the life to come.

S E R M O N XV.

The Obscurity and Imperfection of our
Religious Knowledge.

ISAIAH XLV. 15.

*Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O
God of Israel the Saviour.*

TH E S E words contain a pathetic acknowledgment which the Prophet makes of the unsearchableness of God's providence; or rather a conclusion which he draws from certain mysterious dispensations, specified in the foregoing part of the chapter. In other places of scripture God is said to *hide his face from the children of men*; which expression seems to import nothing more than the suspending of his favour, and the withdrawing of his protection for a season; or a withholding

of those spiritual consolations, whereon the peace and tranquillity of men's minds chiefly depend. But the words before us have a different meaning, and seem principally to point at the obscurities of divine providence, at the incomprehensibleness of God's ways and dealings with the children of men; and that not only upon the account of the infinite perfections of the Deity, and the weakness and imperfection of our own understandings, which renders us incapable of comprehending his works and ways; not only, I say, upon this account, but also upon another, which seems plainly intimated in my text. For the expression of *God's hiding himself* implies a design, an intention of concealing from men some things concerning himself, which they are even in this life capable of knowing. The prophet's meaning seems to be, that, in some cases, God purposely withholds from us that light which our minds are even at present able to receive; and that, for certain wise ends, he chooses sometimes to obscure himself, to cover his designs from our sight, and throw a cloud over his proceedings.

In discoursing of these words, I shall,

First, Enquire more particularly how and
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in what respects God may be said to be a *God that hideth himself*.

Secondly, Endeavour to give some satisfactory account of this matter.

First, I am to enquire how and in what respects God may be said to be a *God that hideth himself*. Because we cannot see God, nor perceive any thing of him by our senses, we must not therefore conclude that he hides his existence from us. As God is a spirit, he must necessarily be invisible and imperceptible. This is only a consequence of his nature; and therefore he cannot be said to *hide himself* in this respect, or upon this account. And indeed the being of God is so far from being hid, that nothing is more manifest or more evident. If we make use at all of our understandings, we must believe that *he is*: nay, we must be certain of it, and more certain than of any other thing whatsoever. Nevertheless, though the being of a God be thus evident and certain, yet, in respect of his nature and attributes, his counsels and operations, and his proceedings with the children of men, the declaration in my text will be found remarkably true. That this may appear more clearly and distinctly, I shall consider it,

First, In respect of God's works.

Secondly, In relation to his word.

First, The works of God may be considered as threefold, *viz.* Works of Nature, Providence, and Grace; of each of which I shall speak briefly in order. I begin with his *Works of Nature*, and shall enquire how and wherein God may be said to have *hid himself* in respect of them. — Could we survey the whole creation, and examine it from one end to the other; as we should every where find the effects of almighty power, so we should discover in every instance marks and proofs of the most consummate wisdom. And yet, notwithstanding God's power and wisdom are thus conspicuous in his works, they seem, in some sense, concealed and covered at the same time. The hand of the divine Artificer is always to be found; but when it is found, it appears, as it were, wrapt up in second causes; insomuch, that though attentive enquirers fail not to discover it, yet the careless and inconsiderate easily overlook it. Such power and skill are employed in the formation and growth of animals and vegetables, as were sufficient to exercise the minds of the wisest men to all eternity: and yet those who look no deeper than the
surfaces

surfaces of things, see nothing of this art, nothing of this wisdom; and perhaps nothing seems to them to require it. Every thing is conducted and carried on in so wonderful a manner, that what is done by the Creator alone seems oftentimes to be done by the creatures themselves. Turn the eyes of an ignorant or unthinking man to the fruits of the earth, and ask him, how it comes to pass that they shoot up, and grow, and arrive at maturity in due season? he will answer, that it is the nature of them so to do. He imagines they operate of themselves, and never considers that hidden power and virtue to which they owe their several alterations and improvements. Not only the fruits of the earth, but living creatures, and even we ourselves, stand in continual need of the Creator's assistance. *For in him we all live, and move, and have our beings.* We talk of nature, and natural powers; but what are they? Nature is nothing more than the will of God, and second causes only instruments in the hands of the first. When we say, that the operations of creatures are natural, we cannot rationally mean any thing else than that they are agreeable to the Creator's laws; to that order and method, and those several rules which he has respectively

ively appointed and established. *With him is the fountain of life, and by him all things consist.* It is he that preserveth man and beast, and in whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind. But though all things are thus actuated by God, and nothing is done or carried on without his concurrence; yet how secretly is all this performed, and how does he, as it were, *hide himself* from common observation! This we find in a most sublime manner expressed by Job in the following words: *O that I knew, says he, where I might find him! Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him. On the left hand, where he doth work; but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.*

Secondly, And this oftentimes holds equally true in respect of the *Works of Providence*, as well as Nature. Nothing less than the same infinite wisdom that made the world is capable of governing it: and accordingly we are sure it is thus governed. But yet there are many providential dispensations very dark and mysterious, and which have puzzled and perplexed the most considerate men. Thus, for instance, before immortality

talities and a future state were fully brought to light by the gospel, we find nothing was harder to account for, than that good men should so often fall into misery and distress, while the wicked prospered and flourished in their iniquities. It was evident from the light of nature, that the former were well-pleasing in God's sight, and the latter an abomination: and yet these seem to be favoured, and those discountenanced. This it was that added such a grievous sting to the calamities of righteous *Job*, and made him break out into those pathetic complaints before cited. Conscious of his own innocence, he could not imagine what it was that had pulled down upon his head such heavy misfortunes, while bad men were easy and happy round about him. All that he was able to conclude from this, was, that God had been pleased to hide himself from him, and leave him in the dark. We find also, that this difficulty gave a great deal of disturbance to the pious *Psalmist*. He acknowledges, that, upon seeing the prosperity of the wicked, his feet were almost gone, and his steps had well-nigh slipped. And many other wise men have stumbled at this matter, and not been able to account for it. Nothing indeed is more easy than for men
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to bewilder themselves in the mazes of divine providence. Upon several accounts God's *judgments* must needs be *unsearchable*, and his *ways past finding out*. It is impossible we should comprehend those dispensations which we only see a part of, and that oftentimes a very small one. Were we able to view the chain from beginning to end, that which now appears confusion, we should then discover to be the exactest order and regularity. But, alas! we seldom see more than a few broken links; and, being thus short-sighted, it is no wonder if we be often puzzled and confounded: and as our incapacity is one reason, so another may be drawn from the doctrine of my text. God is often pleased purposely to hide his counsels, and to throw a cloud over his proceedings, and that for wise ends and reasons, as will appear afterwards.

Thirdly, The *third* sort of divine works proposed to be considered, is *works of grace*; wherein also we may observe various difficulties. In the *Jewish* dispensation we find the favours of Heaven, and the privileges of revelation, confined to this one people, exclusively of the rest of mankind; and a people too of the most froward and untractable dispositions; who were remarkably disobedient
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and rebellious towards God, and who provoked him to displeasure by continual provocations. Nevertheless they were for a long time thus distinguished from the rest of mankind, who were permitted to *sit in darkness*, and from whom God might be said to *hide himself*; since they only enjoyed the dim light of nature, and were obliged to follow the uncertain dictates of their own minds. It is true, indeed, that the *Jews*, notwithstanding their constant intercourses with Heaven, were not fully and clearly enlightened. Such revelations were only made them as best suited the ends and purposes of that dispensation: many things were wrapt up in types and shadows, and even some of the chief doctrines of religion were suffered to remain obscure, and never fully brought to light till the arrival of the gospel.—And here perhaps it may be thought the declaration of my text cannot extend, or hold true any further. For whatever obscurities might attend men's natural reasonings, and the imperfections of the *Mosaic* dispensation, yet it may be thought they are all removed by the gospel. That there, instead of hiding, God has manifested himself in the clearest manner, and discovered to us his own perfections, as well as our duty. To which I answer, that though we find there

there great light in respect of these points, as well as a full confirmation of the great doctrine of immortality and a future state, which mankind chiefly wanted; yet nevertheless my text is applicable even to this state; only in different respects, and under different considerations. Though the wisdom and goodness of God be there more abundantly manifested; yet even still, how unsearchable are his counsels, and how incomprehensibly mysterious is the whole process of our redemption!—That the Son of God should come down from Heaven, and, as it were, hide himself in our frail nature; that he should submit to the lowest condition, and the humblest circumstances; that he should condescend to endure shame and reproach, calumny and contempt, insults and outrages, appearing in all the varieties of distress; in a word, that for us men, and for our salvation, he should live so wretched a life, and, after all, die so painful and ignominious a death!—This, I say, may be looked upon as a mystery that will always continue such as passing all human understanding! It sprung from infinite wisdom and goodness, and perhaps nothing finite will be ever able to comprehend it. But,

Secondly,

Secondly, As the declaration of my text holds true in respect of God's *works*, so it will appear the same in respect of his *word*; where we find many things obscure, and, as the apostle himself acknowledges, hard to be understood. We have good reason indeed to believe, that all necessary things are plain and clear, whether relating to faith or practice, which is sufficient to answer any objection that may have been raised on this head. Nevertheless, though fundamentals are thus secured, there are many doctrines and passages of Scripture, and those, no doubt of considerable importance, which must be allowed to be of difficult interpretation, and wherein the holy spirit may be said to have *hid himself*, and concealed his meaning; sometimes in such a manner as to be impenetrable to the most learned and most diligent; elsewhere deeply, yet so as to require industry and impartiality.——For in truth we are not to suppose that the Scriptures are difficult or obscure by chance; something may perhaps be owing to mistakes of copies, and something to a less perfect knowledge of languages, customs, or the like. But if these impediments were fully removed, many difficulties would doubtless remain. For many such occurred to those who applied themselves to the interpretation

pretation of Scripture in the earliest ages of the church, and therefore could not arise from errors in transcribing, nor any other such hindrances as latter ages are apt to complain of. There was then, as well as now, great difference and variety of explications, in respect of divers texts; from whence it is natural to conclude, that the true meaning of those texts was not plain, obvious, and clear; but, on the contrary, ambiguous and obscure, and of doubtful interpretation.—And where the meaning of texts is sufficiently plain and evident, they often contain such truths and doctrines as we are not able to comprehend: such profound truths as baffle all our conceptions, and disappoint our most diligent enquiries. They are proposed to our understandings, as useful to be known, and subservient to the purposes of religion; but not designed to gratify our curiosity. We find ourselves obliged to acquiesce in a general belief. Whenever we attempt to account for them, or to dive into the manner of them, the search is fruitless; and we discover nothing but our own incapacity, and the weakness of our faculties.—Having thus enquired how, and in what respects, God may be said to be *a God that hideth himself*; I proceed, in the

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Second place, To consider briefly what account is to be given of this matter. To give a full account of it, is what cannot be pretended to without arrogance and presumption. Many good and wise reasons there may be, into which we cannot penetrate. Nevertheless there is one general solution that both Reason and Revelation seem to suggest; and which alone may be sufficient to satisfy any impartial mind. If then it be asked, whence arise the forementioned obscurities, and why may it be supposed, that *God hides himself* in this manner from the children of men; the answer is, for the trial of our faith, and the exercise of our virtue. We are not to learn that this life is a *state of discipline*, a scene of probation; and, by consequence, we are to expect such dealings and dispensations as are suitable to such a state. A full and absolute certainty, in respect of the great truths of religion, would, in a great measure, compel men to be virtuous. It would lay such a weight upon their wills as would scarce leave it in their power to choose and determine freely. Or if it did, there would be no merit in such a choice. In our present circumstances, as virtue is laudable, so faith is virtuous. Every man is praise-worthy, who regulates his judgment in such a

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manner as is agreeable to reason and evidence; who, divesting himself of all prejudices, and examining things impartially and attentively, always submits to the fairest appearance of truth, and follows the best light that he is able to discover. in a word, who judges in an unbiaſſed manner, and is directed and determined by evidence alone. To proceed thus, in ſpite of any temptation to the contrary, whether from without or from within, is to act worthily and wiſely, and conformably to the reaſon of their own minds ; and, by conſequence, muſt contribute to render men acceptable to their Maker. And this it is in our religious enquiries, that conſtitutes a true faith, and renders it virtuous and praiſe-worthy. To believe blindly and without grounds, can never be pleaſing to God, becauſe it is repugnant to a rational nature. On the other hand, to believe what we ſee, or what we are infallibly ſure of, can have no worth in it, becauſe it is neceſſary and unavoidable. Should God continually manifeſt himſelf to the children of men, as he did at *Mount Sinai*, in thunders and lightnings, and all the viſible glories of that appearance : or ſhould he reveal himſelf to every man's mind in ſome ſecret, but irrefiſtible manner, explaining to him the diſpenſations of his providence, and

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giving him full assurance of a future judgment, and a life to come: should he further give him a clear view (as far as man's capacity would admit) of his own adorable excellencies and perfections, and the unspeakable happiness that must arise from the enjoyment of him: should God, I say, reveal and manifest himself in this manner to every man's mind (as undoubtedly he might if he so pleased), what would be the consequence of such a manifestation? It may be truly said, indeed, that there would be no such thing as infidelity left in the world; and it may as truly be said, that neither would there be any faith left. The truths of religion would then take full possession of men's minds; but certainly there would be no praise, no merit in their giving an assent which they could not possibly refuse. And as faith would thus be destroyed, so virtue in general would be greatly impaired and diminished. Instead of being led to their duty, men would then be driven. The motives to perform it would be so strong and powerful, that it may be questioned whether any would be able to resist them. Thus virtue would lose its nature, or at least be very much depreciated. For as there can be no virtue without free choice, whatever impairs the latter,

must, in proportion, diminish the former. Men should be induced to practise virtue from its intrinsic excellence, as it is perfectly amiable and reasonable in itself, and entirely conformable to the will of God. But considering the frailty and corruption of our nature and our present circumstances, these considerations are not always sufficient to support men in the performance of their duty. God was pleased, therefore, to strengthen and reinforce them by the hopes and expectations of a future reward. And very proper this motive was in the way we find it proposed, to influence and incline men's wills, and bring them into the paths of virtue. But if, instead of *walking by faith*, men were to walk by *sight*; if, instead of well-grounded hopes, they had had infallible certainties, obedience would have been a necessary thing, and it would scarce have been in men's power to have departed from their duty. In short, as virtue cannot in many cases be supported without a well-grounded expectation of reward, so neither can it well consist with an absolute certainty, and clear perception of those rewards which the gospel propounds to us. It was fitting that men should be brought to perform their duty by rational inducements; but irresistible motives were repugnant

repugnant to virtue, and the nature of moral agents.

From the foregoing doctrine it may naturally be inferred, that we ought never to part with a plain, evident truth, upon the account of any difficulties or obscurities that may happen to accompany it. This is unreasonable upon several accounts; but I would only observe now, that it is contrary to the nature of things. We see in fact, that the plainest and most important doctrines are attended with such difficulties, and have, as it were, a dark side. The brightest truths are shaded, or at least appear so in our present perceptions. That the world was created by an Almighty Agent, and is governed by his infinite wisdom, is as certain as any thing can be; and must be true, if our faculties be so. And yet, as manifest as these truths are, they are attended with various difficulties, which in all ages have very much perplexed and puzzled the minds of men. It is therefore our business, and our duty, to adhere to what is plain, whatever difficulties may arise out of it. What is evidently true can never be rendered false by any obscurities or perplexities that may offer themselves to our minds along with it. And if we cannot clear them up, we must

be content to let them remain such, till we arrive at that state, in which our perceptions will be improved, and our faculties enlarged. Were we to embrace and hold fast no truth, till we comprehended every thing relating to it, we should be forced to sit down in absolute scepticism, and believe nothing. To prevent, therefore, or bring down such vain imaginations, we should often reflect on the straitness of our understandings, and the scantiness of our knowledge. We should consider how dim our ideas are, how broken our views; that *we know* nothing at present otherwise than *in part*; and can only *see as it were through a glass darkly*. God has been pleased to order, for wise reasons, that it should be so. He has set these bounds to our conceptions, and determined that in this life they shall reach no further. A serious consideration whereof, as it tends to inspire us with humility, so it will prove a strong guard and security to our faith.

The like good effect it may have on the practice of our duty, to the performance of which we are invited by very powerful motives and encouragements. For such we shall find them to be, if we consider rightly; notwithstanding their being invisible and
remote,

remote, and the obscure and imperfect conceptions we have of them. We have already seen, that we ought not at present to have clearer views of them, and that it was fitting they should be, in some measure, hid from us. I before observed, that we ought not to be driven or compelled to our duty, but only inclined and induced; and if the motives of religion were more clearly manifested than they are, instead of inducing and encouraging, they would irresistibly have engaged men, and all their obedience would have been a sort of constraint. Since then there is so good a reason, why the rewards of futurity are so imperfectly and darkly exhibited to our minds, we ought to be satisfied with the light we have; which, upon due examination, we shall find abundantly sufficient for the purposes of religion. Let us then be content at present to *walk by faith*, which assures us, that our virtuous labours *can never be in vain*. We shall surely find that eternal life (how little soever we may understand of it now) will be a gift worthy of the Almighty Donor; a happiness capable of filling the largest capacities, and satisfying the most boundless desires. *For in his very presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand rivers of pleasure for evermore.*

S E R M O N XVI.

Of the different Temptations incident to
different Men.

H E B. XII. Part of the First Verse.

— *And the sin which doth so easily beset us.*

IN the foregoing chapter, the Apostle discourses of the excellence of a true faith, exemplified in the righteous fathers of old; who, by virtue thereof, triumphed over the greatest difficulties and distresses, and gave the world many illustrious testimonies of the truth and efficacy of religion. And from hence he draws the inference with which this chapter begins. *Wherefore, says he, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us,*
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and let us run with patience the race that is set before us: that is, since there are such strong evidences to support and confirm our hope of a blessed immortality, let us strive to obtain it with our utmost diligence and vigour. In order thereto, let us carefully remove all obstacles out of our way; particularly those sins to which we are more especially liable: forasmuch as these greatly interrupt and entangle us in our spiritual race, and hang, as it were, like a dead weight on all our endeavours. Laying therefore these aside, and cheerfully encountering whatever difficulties we meet with, we must patiently persevere in well-doing, and continue immoveable in our duty: thus shall we not fail to obtain at length the inestimable prize of eternal life.— It is not my design at present to consider the whole of this inference, which the Apostle draws from the foregoing chapter, nor to treat of the several parts and particulars of it, but to confine myself to the clause in my text, *the sin which doth so easily beset us*: this being what the Apostle represents as the chief impediment to a virtuous course of life.

By the *sin* here spoken of, we are not to understand any particular sin, that *besets* and endangers all men alike. Some are more obnoxious

obnoxious to one, and some to another. Whatever the cause of it be, almost every man has his peculiar bias, his particular propensity; which, while it remains unsubdued, may be called his favourite inclination; and, while he continues to gratify it, his darling sin: for it possesses the first place in his affections, and thereby continually keeps a most powerful influence over him.——This then we may justly suppose to be meant by *the sin which so easily besets us*. In the consideration whereof I shall endeavour, in the first place, to account for the fact, by pointing out some of the principal causes and occasions of it.

First, I begin with observing, that men's natural *constitutions* and complexions may have a considerable influence this way; by exposing them in a peculiar manner to correspondent temptations. God created man pure and unspotted, and perfect in his kind; but when he lost his innocence, and contracted guilt, his affections became depraved, and his inclinations tainted. This taint was hereditary, and descended on the whole species, which is universally addicted to sin and evil. But though all men are thus naturally prone to sin, yet this propensity differs much both in kind and degree. Though every

every man inherits a general corruption, yet it operates not in all alike, but breaks out, and sheds its malignity in various manners. As this cannot be ascribed to any original diversity in men's minds, it must be owing to the different texture and constitution of their bodies. But how, or which way, such effects are produced, is far above our present comprehension. Nevertheless the fact is unquestionable. Besides the general depravity common to mankind, it is manifest, that men are born with particular tendencies and dispositions to evil, which are usually predominant in them, and beset them on all occasions. As their constitutions make them more liable to some distempers than others; so they render them more obnoxious to some vices than others.—Thus, for instance, some men are naturally more sanguine and presumptuous; others diffident and desponding. Some bring into the world with them softer and more voluptuous inclinations; others an excessive thirst after fame, and an uncommon measure of ambition. Some are peculiarly prone to heat and fire of temper, easily kindled, and blown up by any thing into a flame: others are of so easy and flexible a disposition, as to be in danger of
yielding

yielding to almost every temptation, and of conforming to every vicious practice they meet with.——These, and the like propensities, may increase and get strength several ways; but still it is evident, that they have a foundation in nature, and grow, as it were, out of men's respective constitutions. If they be not carefully watched, and vigorously withstood, they lead directly to sin; and that sin *easily besets men*, and, in proportion, is always hardest to be subdued.

Secondly, Another cause of men's being peculiarly addicted to some sins, is the prevalence of *custom*; which may be, and is, justly accounted a second nature; the influence and power of it being oftentimes little inferior to the other. It ties men so fast, that they seldom know how to disengage themselves; and binds them down so close, that they have scarce strength to rise up against it. When a man has contracted any particular vice, and that vice, by frequent repetition and long practice, settles into a confirmed habit, he then becomes an absolute slave to it; and it is with great difficulty that he shakes off the yoke, and recovers his liberty. So great is the difficulty in this case, that our Saviour represents it by *plucking out a right eye, and cutting off*
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a right hand. And it appears still greater in the language of the prophet : *Can the Ethiopian, says he, change his skin, or the leopard his spots ; then may he do good, who is accustomed to do evil.* Which, whether it be understood in general, or in particular, must, at least, signify the exceeding great power and dominion of sinful habits. — There are some sins which can maintain their ground no other way. I instance in *profane swearing* ; which is a mere custom, and nothing else. It is hard to find the least shadow of temptation to lead any man into it. For what sense does it please ? What inclination does it gratify ? There is nothing at all in it that can possibly recommend it to a man's deliberate choice. Nevertheless, whenever he falls insensibly into it, and brings it to a habit, it then takes root, like other sins, and becomes as hard to get rid of as the rest. Though it has no power but what he has given it ; yet even thus it prevails, and too often continues unconquered to the last. — Again ; *avarice* may be looked upon as a sin which derives its power much more from custom than nature. How far a man may be inclined to it naturally, I shall not inquire. Without question it must be a settled habit that brings

brings him to be a miser. If to hoard, without a prospect or design of enjoyment, be a pleasure, it must be an unnatural pleasure. For nature covets nothing but in order to use. All the rest, therefore, must be owing to custom; which turns the means into the end, and makes men go on getting and grasping what they can neither expect should be used by themselves, nor by any that belong to them. They are got into the road of gain; and therein they continue to travel, without ever arriving at the end of their journey, till the grave put a period to it.—Another *sin, which easily besets men*, and which is likewise produced and confirmed by custom, is *intemperance*. Though human nature be very corrupt, yet, of itself, it does not prompt to excess; but is rather disgusted with it. Intemperance is not limited by the gratification of appetite; but often goes much further, even to uneasiness, displeasure, and aversion. This can only be owing to the witchcraft of an evil habit, and the tyranny of custom. Men bring themselves, by little and little, to the most exorbitant excesses; and where nature denies real pleasures, they take up with such as are fantastical and imaginary.—The power of custom is no less remarkable in
sins

sins of omission, than in those of commission, as might be shewn at large, if the copiousness of the subject would admit of it. But,

Thirdly, Another occasion of men's obnoxiousness to some sins more than others, arises from their respective *states of life*. Different conditions expose them to different temptations. Prosperity and adversity have their peculiar snares, difficulties, and trials. Each of them places men in the neighbourhood of certain vices, from which the other is more remote.—An affluence of the good things of life makes men liable, more than ordinary, to the swellings of pride, to hardness of heart, and a forgetfulness of God and their duty: to trust in themselves, and confide in their own strength: to set their affections on earthly things, and be too much devoted to the enjoyments of this present life.—On the other hand, adversity and poverty lay men open to discontent, and murmurings at divine Providence; and likewise expose them more than ordinary to fraud and injustice, theft and rapine. Thus, whether men are high or low, rich or poor, they are sure to encounter peculiar temptations, which more naturally and more easily beset them. To this purpose, very remarkable

markable are the words of *Agur*: Give me, says he, *neither poverty nor riches, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

I might proceed, and carry on the same observation to men's different *professions*, and ways of life; most, or all of which, are more or less secure in some respects, and slippery in others; thereby administering various occasions of trying their virtue, and proving their integrity.——I might likewise take notice of the different periods and stages of life, which have all their respective trials and temptations, and render men obnoxious to those correspondent sins which are severally incident thereto. But I shall not enlarge on either; partly as it would take up too much of our present time, and partly as they must needs readily occur to every man's reflection.

Having thus briefly shewn that the minds of men are generally drawn and biassed more strongly towards some sins than others, and pointed out the principal causes and occasions thereof, I shall proceed to consider the wisdom and necessity of complying with the exhortation in my text; that is, of *laying aside those sins which so easily beset us*: that

we take especial care in combating and conquering these before they get an absolute dominion over us: that the more familiar, and prevalent, and powerful, any sin is, the more necessary it is to set ourselves against it with all our might, and continually strive with it, till it be subdued. For this, and this only is the true and proper use of the fact we have been considering.—We must not imagine that it will afford any excuse or shelter for impenitence: we must by no means think of turning it into a plea for retaining our darling sins, and wilfully indulging ourselves in the commission of them. For this would prove a most fatal delusion. It is allowed that our natural constitutions do not depend on our wills, nor are any way subject to our choice. And the same may be said, in a great measure, in respect of those conditions and states of life wherein Providence has placed us. But what then? Does it follow from hence that we are to behave as we please, and do whatever is right in our own eyes? Have we not power and liberty to perform our duty and discharge our obligations, notwithstanding the difficulties and propensities above mentioned? Whatever trials or temptations we may meet with, we never are, never can be under a necessity of yielding

yielding to them. Whatever be our case, however we are circumstanced, if we do not acquit ourselves well, it must be our own fault. We are always *able* to do well; and what reason, what cause can we shew, why we should not be *willing*?—Whatever may be said to particulars, yet in general the disadvantages of nature are not so unequal as we are apt to reckon them. If any man is naturally more prone than ordinary to some particular sins, he is commonly so much less prone to others: so that the more difficult he finds his duty in one respect, the easier he finds it in another. This, I say, is generally, and for the most part, the truth of the case. However, they who labour under the greatest inconveniencies, have it always in their power to hold fast their integrity. For very sure we are, that God affords all men strength sufficient to withstand the corruptions of their nature, to break the force of evil habits, and conquer every temptation. We are therefore without excuse, whenever we transgress his laws, and depart from our duty. In vain do we plead the bent of our nature, or the bias of our constitutions. In vain do we allege the dangers and difficulties belonging to our respective conditions. For we know very well that this life in ge-

neral is a state of trial, and intended so to be, and therefore it must be very absurd for any man, while he is in it, to expect an exemption from trials and temptations. If some are further tried and more exposed than others, they either do or may receive proportionable succours: to which may be added, that if they acquit themselves well, they are sure to obtain a proportionable recompense. None of us have cause to complain that we are tried or tempted beyond what we are able. However we may be attacked, however pressed, our success is in our own hands, and victory within our reach. If we are resolved to maintain our liberty, and exert the powers that God has given us; whatever circumstances we may be in, we are sure to prevail. We shall neither need to fear the bondage of corruption, nor the tyranny of custom, neither the deceitfulness of sin, nor the circumvention of our spiritual adversary. A well-disposed and resolute mind is armed against all dangers, and fortified against all assaults. Its steadfast purposes are not to be shaken by any trials from without, or temptations from within. In short, it is the proper work and business of religion, to guard against both. True virtue consists in maintaining the authority and government of

reason over our appetites and affections, and in acting conformably to the imperial dictates of our own minds. And since this is our duty, we are certainly capable of performing it, for doubtless whatever God requires at our hands, he will enable us to perform, if we be not wanting to ourselves.

Setting aside then all pretences of impotence and inability; the matter will rest merely on our wills. And in order to engage our consent, let us briefly consider of what great moment it is to oppose and conquer our darling sins.—That our prosperity both here and hereafter entirely depends on the favour of God, we are fully assured, and cannot be ignorant of it if we would. How then is this mighty point to be gained? Can we obtain and secure the favour of God by observing some part of our duty, and neglecting the rest? Will he be satisfied with us, if we pick and choose out of his commandments what we best like, and is most agreeable to our humours and inclinations? Have we any grounds to conclude, that he will grant us a dispensation for our beloved habits, and favourite transgressions? Most certain it is that he never will, if either reason or revelation be to be trusted. He has promised indeed to pardon all kinds of sin;

but how, and in whom? In them only who heartily repent, and sincerely reform. But that he should pardon those sins, or any of them, which men will not repent of, which they will not part with on any terms, but obstinately hold fast to their live's end; this, I say, is both contrary to the word of God, and repugnant to all his attributes. In this sense it is, that *he who offendeth in one point, is guilty of all*. If consistently with the rectitude and perfection of his nature, God might excuse and dispense with some sins; why not with others? why not with any, or even all the rest? It is absolutely inconsistent with his justice and holiness, that he should be reconciled to any sinner while he wilfully perseveres in any known sin: for all sins whatever are naturally and necessarily detestable in the sight of God. He *is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity* of any kind with indulgence and toleration. He is ever willing and ready to forgive those sins which are renounced by the sinner: but most assuredly he will not, he cannot pardon those which are kept and impenitently persisted in. —In vain then does any man expect that God will compound with him for a partial obedience. He requires our whole hearts, and entire services, and demands an universal submission

submission to his righteous will. His authority is sacred in every instance, and binds us quite through without exception. And indeed so does our own interest, which is inseparable from our duty, and keeps pace with it from first to last. Virtue and obedience must sooner or later turn to the best account, and produce the noblest advantages. Can we be so senseless as to imagine that any of our sins, or sinful enjoyments, ought to be dearer to us than the favour of God, and the fruition of a blessed immortality? If we can think and judge in this manner, our reason and understanding are useless things. As well might we pronounce chaff better than corn, dross than gold, pebbles than diamonds. Nay, we might as well maintain darkness to be preferable to light, and a moment's duration longer than eternity. All the enjoyments of this world, whether sinful or innocent, are mere shadows in comparison of the joys and glories of the next. They weigh nothing at all, but are lighter than vanity itself, when set in the balance against that transcendent good, which God has provided for his faithful servants. How then can we grudge to sacrifice an appetite or a passion, or a vicious habit, to such an interest as this! How refuse to observe those rules whereon depends our everlasting welfare!

For, in the next place, we ought to consider, that this is the very case, not only in respect of God's appointment, but from the nature of the thing. Vice in general is the bane of the soul, and essentially destructive of its happiness. To cherish the former, in order to promote the latter, is no better than taking poison for the benefit of our health. Every vice, every sinful habit, how familiar or agreeable soever it may be to us, is full of malignity and venom; which, like an ulcer in our vitals, eats into the very substance of the soul, and produces the most deadly symptoms. All sin terminates in grief, and sorrow, and misery, as naturally *as the sparks fly upwards*. And indeed it is hard to say, whether it be more odious in itself, or mischievous in its consequences. If it be pleasure in hand (though it ill deserves the name), it is sure to be torment in reversion. Nay, it often begins immediately to exert its virulence. When it has soothed a man's sense, or pleased his fancy for a very little while, it stings soon after, and *strikes like a dart through his liver*. In some cases, even the present anguish of a wounded conscience is grievous and intolerable. And if it continue unhealed, it must be infinitely more so hereafter.

hereafter. Whatever unrepented sins and crimes men carry into the next world with them, will be so many monsters in their eyes, and furies in their hearts, incessantly plaguing and tormenting their souls without respite, and without remedy. Those very sins, which were such favourites in this life, will be fiends in the next, implacable and unconquerable. In short, they not only deprive men of heaven, but breed a hell within their own bosoms.

Such then is the nature of sin and vice, according to the several kinds and degrees of it. And on both the fore-mentioned accounts it is absolutely necessary that we cleanse ourselves from it, and purify our minds to the utmost of our power. The benefits to be reaped from hence are so very great, that we ought to stick at no difficulty in the accomplishment of it. The prize which is set before us is of so inestimable a value, that if our race was much longer and more painful than it is, we ought to run with patience, and even with cheerfulness. More especially it concerns us to take particular care of those sins, which more *easily beset us*, whether they be constitutional or habitual. When we have once conquered these, we shall meet with little opposition

sition from the rest, but proceed with ease to an absolute and entire victory.

In order thereto, it behoves us to arm ourselves with the firmest and most stedfast resolution, of withstanding all allurements, and resisting every temptation. We must exert our most earnest endeavours, and put forth our whole strength; ever remembering the mighty danger which we propose to escape, and the ruin that threatens us. On the other hand, we must encourage ourselves by a frequent contemplation of those unspeakable and endless rewards which are designed to crown our conquest. A just sense of these will animate us upon all occasions, alleviate all hardships, and constantly inspire us with strength and vigour. In a word, this will reconcile us to every difficulty that we may happen to meet with, facilitate our duty, and perpetually support us in the practice of it.

S E R M O N XVII.

Of the Idolatry of Christians.

D E U T. IV. 39.

Know therefore this Day, and consider it in thine Heart, that the Lord be is God, in Heaven above, and upon the Earth beneath, there is none else.

WHEN we consider the great variety and multiplicity of strange Gods, which the heathens acknowledged and adored, and observe what mean and even despicable objects they honoured with divine worship, numbering among their deities not only irrational beings, but senseless and inanimate creatures, and, as it were, the very dregs of the creation: when, I say, we consider this, we are apt to look upon it as the height of folly and stupidity, and to wonder how any men endued with reason could possibly be guilty of it. And indeed such idolatrous abomi-

abominations are so repugnant even to natural reason, and the light of men's own minds, that it is just matter of wonder how they could ever fall into them; especially that they should prevail so far, as to become almost the universal practice of mankind. Nay, the very *Jews*, after they had been miraculously delivered by divine power, after they had such visible manifestations of the true God, been witnesses of his glorious majesty, and received laws from him in the most solemn and awful manner, did nevertheless continue prone to idolatry, and were frequently relapsing into it, insomuch that they stood in need of being often warned and put in mind of the great truth in my text.

This is indeed a full proof of the corruption of man's nature, and shews the darkness of his understanding, as well as the depravity of his will. But yet it behoves us to consider, whether, at the same time that we are pitying others for such follies and absurdities, we are not in some measure guilty of them ourselves. And it is but too manifest that we are, how little soever we may be sensible of it. Though we may not be guilty of idolatry in the same sense and the same way with the *Heathens* and *Jews*; yet alas! we are very far from being clear of this heinous crime, as we shall certainly find, if we try
ourselves

ourselves either by the rule of God's word or the dictates of right reason.

We may say perhaps, and that truly, that we believe in one only God, and acknowledge *that there is none else, either in heaven above, or on earth beneath.* But what can this avail, if we do not act conformably to such a belief? We may further allege, that we put up our prayers and supplications to the true God only; and it is not denied, but in this respect also we distinguish ourselves from the idolatrous world; nevertheless neither will this clear us: for are there not other fundamental parts of divine worship, besides prayers and praises? Are we not to fear the true God, as well as to believe in him? Are we not to put our trust in him, as well as to call upon him? Are we not to rely on him for the deliverances and blessings that we stand in need of? Is he not to be the supreme object of our hopes, wishes, and desires? Are we not ever to esteem him as our chief good, and to direct our aims and endeavours accordingly? In a word, to love him with all our hearts and with all our souls, so as that he may have no rival in our affections; much less that any thing be preferred before him?—These are not only branches of our duty towards God, but essential parts
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of divine worship, which does by no means consist wholly in outward acts and significations, but the chief part of it is performed in our minds and thoughts, and all of it is founded in those conceptions, and that esteem, which we habitually entertain of the supreme Being.

Now it is certain that every part of divine worship belongs to God alone, and ought ever to be appropriated to him. Whenever, therefore, in any instance, we transfer it from him to any other object, we are so far guilty of idolatry. Though our prayers and adorations be always directed aright; yet, if our hearts and affections be alienated from the supreme Being, and fixed on created objects, so that we place our happiness in them, and pursue them as our principal good, this is actually robbing God of his honour and worship; inasmuch as hereby we attribute that to the creature which incommunicably belongs to the Creator.—He who loves the world, or the things of the world, more than God, does in effect make the world his God, and in some sense worships it as such. And since we cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time, how injurious must we be to the former, in every instance of homage and service that we pay the latter? God will not suffer,

suffer, as we may well suppose, any of his creatures to stand in competition with him, or permit them to have any share of that honour which is peculiarly due to himself. We are allowed to set some value on created goods, and indeed otherwise they would be no goods, nor could we ever account them blessings, as we do, and ought to do. But, nevertheless, we must not place our happiness in them. He who made us, can only make us happy. He has not given such a power to any of his creatures, but reserved it to himself: and accordingly he expects that we seek it in him, and depend wholly upon him for it; and this is part of that honour and worship which he requires at our hands, strictly forbidding us to put our trust in the creature, to rely on it for our happiness, or to pursue it under any such notion.—From hence therefore it may justly be concluded that idolatry is still a reigning vice, even among Christians, who many ways involve themselves in the guilt of it, through their irregular inclinations and criminal pursuits.

The *voluptuous* man is devoted to sensual pleasure; it is the great and perhaps the only object of his wishes and desires; he makes his happiness to consist in it, and expects every thing from it. It engages all his thoughts,

thoughts, and his hopes and fears entirely terminate upon it. In a word, he regards it as his chief good, and prosecutes it accordingly. Does then such a one consider, *that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and on the earth beneath, and that there is none else?* Does he not rather, as much as in him lies, dethrone the true God, and set up ten thousand idols instead of him? even as many as there are objects that can gratify his senses? To these he makes his vows, and offers sacrifice, even the sacrifice of his whole heart, which is entirely devoted to them. He may acknowledge perhaps the existence of a God; but he manifestly denies some of his attributes, and pretends to find them in his creatures. He disowns, in effect, God's infinite power and perfection, and considers him not as the supreme Being. For how can he think him supreme, or worship him as such, when he sets other things above him, and prefers them before him? If he does not, in some sense, ascribe more good and more perfection to those things, he could never give them the pre-eminence. And if he does ascribe greater perfection to them, does he not so far give them the supremacy, and place the creature higher than the Creator?

This,

This, in reality, is paying them divine honours, and by consequence, is truly idolatry.

The same observation holds true with respect to the pursuits of *ambition*. For the ambitious man is devoted to honour and power, as the other is to pleasure, and his heart is, in like manner, set upon them. Though his idols be different, his idolatry is the same. The supreme Being is equally postponed and dishonoured, and his glory and worship transferred.

Again, the *miser* is in a peculiar manner chargeable with the same crime. We find the scripture expressly calls covetousness *idolatry*; which is a full confirmation of all that has been said; inasmuch as in this, and the foregoing instances, the reason is the very same, the difference of the object making no alteration. For the objects are all of the same kind; that is, created goods and worldly enjoyments. However, the miser is, in a more emphatical sense, called an idolater, upon the account of the nearer resemblance between his idols and those which are properly so called. For his idols, like those of the heathens, are of silver and gold, and the work of men's hands; and it is evident, that he pays them several

kinds of divine worship.—Is not wealth the great object of the miser's trust? of his hopes, his wishes and desires? Does he not esteem it his chief, or rather his only good? the source of all happiness and every satisfaction? Is it not the delight of his eyes, and the joy of his heart? What is there, either in heaven above, or on earth beneath, that he desires besides it? He knows no prosperity but what arises from the safety, or encrease of it; no adversity but the loss and diminution of it. It is this that gives the relish to all the advantages and enjoyments of his life; and when any calamity or distress befalls him, this is his refuge and support, his only consolation: Or, to speak more properly, while this is in a safe and flourishing condition, nothing can distress him; as, on the contrary, when it happens otherwise, nothing can comfort him. His rejoicing is not the testimony of his conscience; but, as *Job* expresses it, *because his wealth is great, and his hand hath gotten much.* He hath made his gold his hope, and said to the fine gold, *Thou art my confidence.* Does he not then plainly make it his God? Yes, and with him there is none else; at least none that appears worthy of his regard. It takes up more room in his fordid mind, than

than the whole universe besides. Neither the wonderful works of nature, nor the great Author of it, are considered by him; but all his thoughts and contemplations are engrossed by the idol of his own setting up. In short, the miser's *godliness* is *gain*, and he makes the pursuit of it his whole duty.

From what has been said, it plainly appears, that following after strange gods is still a prevailing impiety, even among Christians. Too justly may we apply to them, what the apostle lays to the charge of the Gentiles; that *when they knew God, they glorified him not as God; but worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever*. Is not this evidently and literally the case of those we have been considering? For though their prayers be directed aright, yet we see their thoughts and affections run miserably astray. To what purpose do they serve God with their lips, while their hearts are far from him? If they, who are more strictly obliged to worship God in spirit and truth, do nevertheless only worship him outwardly, and with words, are they not still more inexcusable? There can certainly be no true worship without inward honour and reverence: how therefore can that man be a true wor-

shipper of God, who prefers other things before him, who loves and esteems them better, and directs his thoughts and endeavours accordingly?

We are apt to reflect upon the abominations of the heathen with wonder and pity, if not with contempt. And yet, in the cases above mentioned, our folly and impiety are little less than theirs, and are indeed much more strange and unaccountable, considering the greater light, and the superior advantages which we enjoy. The heathens worshipped the creature, sacrificed to brute beasts, offered up prayers and praises to things inanimate, even to stocks and stones: an amazing instance of human folly, it must be owned; for what could men expect from such impotent gods? or how could they think they should help them, when they could not hear them? What virtue, what power, could men imagine there should be in a senseless idol, void of thought, and even destitute of life and motion? How did these vain worshippers dishonour God, and degrade themselves; and what an indelible scandal did they bring upon human nature!

This then is most true and most notorious. But instead of stopping our thoughts here, let us proceed to the examination of ourselves, and,

and, as I have already shewn, we shall soon discover an equal measure of folly and guilt. Though we do not actually pray to the same despicable creatures, yet we worship them in our hearts, ascribing to them that power and perfection which belongs only to the Deity. If it be alleged, that the use and enjoyment which we have of them is the reason of the value which we put upon them, this is not always true, and if it was, would be little to the purpose. It is not always true, because we sometimes value, and even place our happiness in, those things whereof we have no use, no enjoyment. For can the miser be said to enjoy his wealth? and yet he values and loves it to adoration. What more good does it really do him, than the idols of the heathens did them? The benefit from both is alike purely imaginary. Were the miser's gold melted down and made into an image, it would not be more useless to him than it is, and perhaps he could not then worship it more than he does now.

But supposing he did enjoy whatever he possesses; nay, supposing he enjoyed whatever this world could yield him; yet still it would be very unreasonable to set his heart upon such things, and place his happiness in them; and that because they are not capable

of answering his expectation: the nature of man is so much superior to the enjoyments of this world, that it is not in the power of any of them to make him happy. They can never give full contentment and satisfaction to his mind.—But this is not all. The worldly man not only embraces a false good, but forsakes and neglects the only true good. His mind is alienated from the supreme Being, the author of all happiness, and the possessor of all possible perfection. Him he leaves for the sake of his creatures, and oftentimes the meanest and most worthless amongst them. He prefers the objects of sense before the fruition of the Deity; and the empty and perishing pleasures of this world before the eternal and unspeakable enjoyments of a blessed immortality.—And as the folly of this is exceeding great, so is the wickedness. What a great dishonour, what a grievous indignity is hereby done to the divine majesty! What impiety must it be, thus to neglect the Creator, and idolize his creatures! to pursue *them* with eagerness and impatience, and seldom to give *him* so much as a place in our thoughts! in a word; to esteem and honour them as gods, and to regard him almost as nothing! Was it for this that God gave us such excellent faculties, qualifying us for the know-

knowledge and enjoyment of himself? Did he form us after his own image, and breathe into us the breath of life and immortality, that we might grovel in dust and dirt, and entangle ourselves in all the pollutions of a vain world? All other beings regularly answer the end of their creation, and conspire in shewing forth the praise and glory of him that made them. But man, though he knows God and was made to enjoy him, yet refuses to glorify him, following his own inventions, and running after the foolish devices of his own heart.

If our duty will not bind us, if gratitude will not move us; yet certainly the consideration of our own welfare should affect us. Howsoever we may deceive ourselves, and how prone soever we may be to esteem and idolize we know not what; yet we may and must be assured, that *the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath there is none else*. He is our supreme good, our only happiness; and whenever we forsake him, we surely go astray, and are false to our own interest. To this effect one of the ancients expresses himself in a very sublime meditation:—"Who, says he, or what is my God? I asked the earth, and it said, I am not. I asked the sea, and the deeps, and all

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“ living creatures ; and they answered, We
“ are not thy God. Look above us, and in-
“ quire after him, for here he is not. I
“ asked the air and all its inhabitants ; yea,
“ the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars, and
“ they confessed, We are not him whom
“ thy soul seeketh.”——To an attentive in-
quirer every thing discovers its own emptiness,
and its Maker’s fulness. That variety of
lesser goods, which are scattered abroad in
this life, was never designed to make us hap-
py, but only to direct our minds and draw
them up to him, who can truly make us so.
God made us for himself, and made us with
such high faculties, that nothing but himself
can perfect our felicity. He never meant us to
live for the low enjoyments of earth and sense;
if he had, he would have framed our natures
accordingly. What need of such capacious
minds, if we were designed for no higher
good than that of sensual enjoyments ? Were
this our chief end, reason and understanding
would be in a great measure lost upon us, and
our best endowments given us in vain.

Since then our chief happiness is not here,
why should we seek it where it is not ? It is
but lost labour, that we strive against the dis-
pensations of the Almighty. For who can
resist his will, or disappoint his counsels ? He
has

has decreed, that this world shall only afford us fitting accommodations in our passage to a better. If we place our happiness below, as we disobey and dishonour him, so we wretchedly delude ourselves. On the contrary, if we acknowledge him to be our sovereign good, and seek after him as such, we cannot possibly fail or be disappointed. He is both able and willing to bless to the uttermost those that serve and worship him as they ought. To secure his favour, is to lay such a foundation for happiness as cannot be shaken. He can equally deliver us from all adversity, and confer all imaginable good. Out of the fulness of his own felicity, he can ever supply us without ceasing; in a word, can bestow on us infinitely better things, than we are either able to wish, or to conceive.

Most certain therefore it is, that God is the only adequate object of our affections. Every thing besides will fail, and fall short. The idols, which we set up here below, are nothing, and will profit us nothing. They will perish, and we shall perish with them, if we put our trust in them. — What remains then, but that we turn from the creature to the Creator; that we break loose from the engagements of this world,

and fix our hearts there only, where true joys are to be found; that we keep our chief good constantly in our eye, and never lose sight of it, till we come to possess it? Thus shall we turn to the Lord with our whole hearts, and every one will say with the Psalmist, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is nothing upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee.*

S E R M O N XVIII.

Of abounding in good Works.

I COR. XV. Part of the last Verse.

— *Always abounding in the work of the Lord ;
forasmuch as you know, that your labour
is not in vain in the Lord,*

THE Apostle, in this chapter, is proving and explaining the doctrine of the resurrection, and, at the conclusion of it, he triumphs over death in the words of the prophet: *Death is swallowed up in victory: O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* — Having proved and described the resurrection, he takes occasion from thence to exhort men to a stedfast perseverance in the faith; to stir them up to good works, and to encourage them in the pursuit and practice of
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their duty. *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as you know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*—In which words we have,

First, A practice enjoined. And,
Secondly, The reason or motive by which he urges and recommends it.

First, We have a practice enjoined; and that is, *always abounding in the work of the Lord.* By which we are to understand, a most careful discharge of those duties which are contained in the divine law, and conformable to the divine will, however manifested or made known. And more especially those moral obligations, those *weightier matters of the law*, which are visibly agreeable to the reason of our own minds, and eminently conducive to the glory of God and the benefit of mankind. For whatever is right and reasonable in itself; whatever is truly beneficial to ourselves and others, we are sure must be his will, and on that account may properly be called *his work*. His work it is, because he requires it, and because it directly tends to the advancement of his honour and glory.—Such are the
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the duties in general wherein men are to abound. More particularly, works of piety towards God; as loving him, fearing him, trusting in him, worshipping him, serving him, and submitting to his will: works of equity and mercy towards men; as dealing justly and conscientiously with them, relieving their necessities, forgiving their injuries, and the like: works of sobriety and moderation towards ourselves; as subduing our lusts, governing our passions, and curbing our desires: in a word, so ruling and conducting ourselves, as may be most conducive to God's glory, and most agreeable to the dignity of our nature. These works are all good in themselves, and therefore indispensably required. We do not indeed find them represented as equally good, and equally important. A greater stress is laid upon some than others. Thus, for instance, works of mercy and charity are inculcated more frequently and forcibly; a peculiar stress is laid upon them, and a remarkable pre-eminence given to them. They are emphatically styled *good works*; and, by the constant exercise of them, men arrive at great degrees of virtue and perfection, and are said to be *rich in good works*. Moreover, other duties are postponed to these, when they

they happen to interfere with each other. Thus God has declared, that he *will have mercy and not sacrifice*; that is, the former preferably to the latter, whenever they stand in competition. And to mention nothing further, when our Saviour is giving a representation of the day of judgment, he singles out works of mercy and charity, and makes the proceedings of that great day turn upon an inquiry into them. Not with a design to intimate a disregard of other duties, much less to exclude them; but to shew the high dignity and peculiar excellence of these. Without question, they are all incumbent on us; all just and fit, and indispensably necessary; and it behoves to endeavour with a proportionable care, to discharge, and even *abound* in them all.

When we are exhorted to abound in good works, we must not understand it in such a sense, as to imagine that there is, or can be, any such thing as superfluity or supererogation. It is utterly impossible that men should ever exceed their duty, or go beyond their obligations: they are obliged to exert themselves to the utmost in the service of God, and the improvement of those talents which he has committed to their trust; and,
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by consequence, there can be no room for works of supererogation, or pretensions of merit. — The meaning then of the expression is plainly this, that we be continually careful and diligent, earnest and zealous in the discharge of our duty; that we strive and contend, with all our might, to glorify God, and imitate his perfections; incessantly concurring in the furtherance and advancement of those great ends which he has ever in view; namely, the perfecting of our own souls, and the maintenance of truth, righteousness, benevolence and charity: that we labour to possess ourselves of those virtues and graces, which are not only the greatest ornaments of our minds, but the ground of our hopes, and the basis of our felicity: that *giving all diligence*, as the apostle exhorts, *we add to our faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity:* For if these things, continues he, *be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* And this he elsewhere expresses by *growing in grace, and being fruitful in every good work.* This implies

plies cultivating our minds with great care and vigilance; making daily advances in piety and virtue, and embracing every fit opportunity of benefiting our fellow-creatures, and bettering ourselves: that we be not only *blameless, harmless, and without rebuke*; but still aiming to improve, and striving to excel, and labouring to distinguish ourselves by superior attainments, and eminent degrees of spiritual perfection.

It is further required in my text, that our performance of good works be not only abundant, but constant. The expression is, *always* abounding; a circumstance, not accidentally inserted, but of great moment, and absolute necessity for answering the great ends of religion. To be only occasionally good and virtuous, as it were by fits and starts, will neither satisfy Heaven nor earth; neither answer the demands of God nor man: and if it would, yet it is by no means sufficient for our own purposes. All intervals and intermissions, in a virtuous course, are so many obstacles both to our happiness and perfection. Virtue must be rooted in our minds, so as to become a fixed, steady, and uniform principle, running through our whole conduct, and influencing our whole lives. Every
state

state and condition of life, every circumstance that we can fall into, whether prosperous or adverse, affords proper opportunities of exercising great and important virtues: and therefore it is always in our power to exercise good works, and carry on our improvements. In short, what we are here exhorted to, is an universal care and endeavour to fulfil the will of God; a constant solicitude to act and walk as we ought to do, in all cases, at all times, and upon all occasions.——Having thus briefly considered the general precept laid down in my text, I proceed, in the

Second place, to that motive which the apostle produces, and presses along with it. Forasmuch as you know, says he, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. Much more is here meant than expressed. Men's virtuous labours will be so far from being *in vain*, that they will turn to the highest account, and redound to their unspeakable advantage. For so the words are to be understood, according to a common and familiar figure of speech. Here then are two things to be distinctly observed and inquired into. The one is, how it appears that good works in general are thus advantageous;

and the other, how more particularly men's *abounding in them* shall turn to such great account. For the motive in my text relates not only to virtue in general, but the progress which men make therein, and those degrees of perfection to which they arrive. Concerning the former of these, I have on several occasions endeavoured to shew, both from reason and revelation, from the nature of man and the perfections of the Deity, that the fact is most certain, and the grounds of it unquestionable: that there is a close and intimate connection between virtue and happiness, which, however it may be accidentally loosened, or interrupted in this world, will be sure to take place in the next, and prevail without change or diminution for ever.

I shall, therefore, confine myself at present to that particular wherein my text is more immediately concerned; namely, the reasons and advantages of *abounding in good works*, of exerting ourselves in the pursuit of virtue, and improving our minds to the utmost of our power.——And here I might observe, in the first place, that such earnest endeavours are, in a particular manner, requisite for our security. We do not precisely know what degree of virtue, what
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measure of good works, will suffice for the accomplishment of our salvation: and therefore it behoves us to take especial care that we do not fall short. We may easily ruin ourselves by being remiss in our duty, and defective in good works; but to *abound* in them can never be either insecure or prejudicial. In no respect can the consequence be dangerous or detrimental. And since the prize is so inestimably great, we certainly cannot be too solicitous to obtain it, or too cautious to prevent the loss of it. On this account it concerns us to aim, if possible, above the mark, lest, by levelling directly at it, we sink beneath it: besides, we have great reason to make allowances for the partiality of our judgments, and the power of self-delusion. Our hearts are full of fallacy and deceit, and perpetually apt to impose upon us, by suggesting that we are wiser, and better, and greater proficient in virtue than we really are. We may easily, therefore, be deceived and misled, unless we allow for the prejudices and indulgences of self-love: that is, by augmenting our care, quickening our endeavours, and striving to abound in good works.——I might further observe, that the greater progress we make in a virtuous course, the less danger we

incur of being at any time seduced or drawn astray. Whatever care we may take, we are not, we cannot be, in this life, perfectly and completely secure. For as we walk in the midst of snares, and are surrounded with temptations, so we are by nature impotent and weak, and by consequence doubly exposed. It highly concerns us, therefore, to remove ourselves as far as possible from the dominions of sin; not only to avoid the danger, but in order to our own safety, to place ourselves at as great a distance from it as we can. Now the way to do this, is to establish ourselves in righteousness, and be great proficient in virtue. The deeper our integrity is rooted, the more secure we are of not letting it go. The more strongly we are confirmed in good habits, the less liable we are to the infection of bad ones. In short, the further we proceed, we are in so much less danger of retreating; and the better we practise our duty, the more satisfactory and delightful it will be to us. In these respects, therefore, our virtuous endeavours, however diligent and vigorous, can never be *in vain*. On the contrary, they turn to a valuable account, and conduce to excellent purposes.

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But the principal considerations are yet behind. To *abound in good works* not only adds to our security, but directly promotes our welfare, and enlarges our prospects of happiness. And indeed it gives a double title, equally firm and unquestionable. The one flows from the nature of the thing, and the other from divine appointment.— That virtue in general is *naturally* productive of happiness, and yields the truest and purest enjoyments, partly in hand, and much more in reversion, I have formerly endeavoured to shew particularly, and at large. From whence it follows, more immediately to our present purpose, that every accession of virtue must be a proportionable addition to happiness. Since it tends, in its own nature, to improve, and perfect, and bless the mind of man, as most assuredly it does; the consequence must be, that it cannot fail to operate, and produce these glorious effects, in proportion to the measure and degree wherein it prevails. This is plain, and even self-evident, from the very nature of causes and effects.— And certainly this is a just motive, a powerful encouragement; and, if duly considered, would be sufficient to quicken our zeal, and excite our most vigorous endeavours. Every

virtue that is acquired, every good habit that is gained, may be considered as a new purchase, a fresh possession, enriching the soul, and enlarging the sphere of its enjoyment; as a real good, and a solid treasure, that can never either fail or fade; which time can neither consume nor diminish, and over which the grave has no power. When all worldly goods and temporal possessions are mouldered away, and vanished for ever; when the pomps and vanities of life are *fled as a dream, or passed away like a morning cloud*; when all the works of the earth shall perish, *the earth itself be burnt up, and the very elements melt away with fervent heat*, even then shall wisdom and virtue lift up their head, and triumph gloriously over the wrecks of nature, and the ruins of the creation. Those deceitful objects which men are so fond of in this world, cannot either accompany, or follow them into another, nor is it fit they should: but their graces and good *works shall follow them*, and be their ornament, their joy, and their glory for ever.—Men are apt to look upon these riches of the soul as a kind of thin, unsubstantial, shadowy possessions; while things sensible and corporeal appear firm and solid; but if they discover it no sooner,

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at least the final event will shew them their mistake. What they look upon as the substance will prove a mere shadow; and what now passes with them for an empty shadow, will hereafter be found the only true and substantial good. When the former shall have undergone a total dissolution, be entirely converted into dust and ashes, and the place thereof be no where found, the latter shall remain undecayed, untouched, and flourish more and more through endless ages.——In short, as the mind only is the seat of perception and enjoyment, so the perfections of the mind are the only solid possessions, and real treasure. As far as *we* are concerned, every thing depends on wisdom and virtue through the whole state of our existence. All our hopes are fixed and centred thereupon; and without them, nothing in the whole world can be of any considerable use or material value. To possess these, is to be so far happy; and to abound in them, is to be rich in the noblest sense: for they are not only true riches, but undefiled, incorruptible, inestimable; they are copies of uncreated excellence, and transcripts of divine perfection. God himself is blessed by them, and his infinite and inconceivable happiness chiefly flows from a

perfect fruition of them. Were he not thus wise and good, neither his greatness, nor dominion, nor omnipotence itself, would suffice for his felicity. Man was created after God's image, however unhappily blotted in him by sin and folly. The only possible way of renewing and repairing it, is by the means that we are now considering. God is infinitely beneficent and gracious: his benefits and blessings are showered down among his creatures without measure, and without end. Herein he delights, and we are certain will delight, to all eternity. Would we then resemble him in our little spheres, and according to our minute capacities, we must *abound in these works of the Lord*, and contribute, as far as lies in our power, to the good of the public, and the universal benefit of our fellow-creatures. And if our power be so small, and abilities so narrow, that our services are very inconsiderable; yet still, in respect of ourselves, *our labour can never be in vain*. Here our endeavours are sure to take effect, and cannot fail of being crowned with success. The advantage hereby redounding to ourselves depends, not on the extent of our power, but the sincerity of our hearts, and the integrity of our wills.

If our aims and our inclinations are unfeignedly devoted to doing good, how little soever we may be able to accomplish, through our want of ability, yet our own point is secured. The events of things are not in our hands; but virtue and goodness are; and according to our improvements in these, we shall be happy in proportion.

But further: This holds good, not only from the nature of the thing, but also by God's appointment, and unchangeable decree. And here again, our virtuous endeavours can never *be in vain*, but will assuredly turn to the highest account. God has provided and promised an additional recompense for the righteous, over and above the natural advantages resulting from the practice of virtue. And though the foundations of happiness must ever be laid in the state and disposition of men's own minds, yet certainly infinite power and goodness may raise what superstructures it pleases, and make suitable additions of various kinds. New channels of enjoyment may be opened, and blessings conferred more and greater than we are now able to comprehend. Accordingly we are assured, *that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive,*

ceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love and obey him.——But this is not all. As God has declared that he will thus reward, and bless and glorify the righteous, so he has further declared, that he will do it in proportion to the degrees of their virtue, and the improvement of their talents. They who sow bountifully shall reap also bountifully; and they who abound in good works, shall abound also in bliss and glory. Agreeably hereto the apostle represents the saints in heaven under these distinctions, and as out-shining one another, even as one star differeth from another star in glory. In this manner does he illustrate and confirm the fact; the grounds of which are equally manifest from natural reason. That God should measure out his favour and bounty by the rule of men's improvements, is so agreeable to truth and equity, that even a heathen might expect it, and rely upon it. For it is obvious to every thinking man, that whatever reason there is for rewarding the righteous, the very same reason there is for doing it in that proportion we are speaking of. Is virtue a proper object of God's favour and kindness? The higher any man's virtue rises, and the more abundant it is,

it must, and will, be recompensed and distinguished accordingly.

This then being the case, what remains but that we see our true interest, and pursue it? The doctrine of my text is supported by such evidence, that no man living can possibly withstand it, otherwise than by turning away his eyes from it. Could we find, among the things of this world, any good as beneficial, as desirable, as durable, as wisdom and virtue, we might then be at liberty to embrace it instead of them. But if this be impossible, as it certainly is, what room can there be to hesitate in our choice? To prefer our bodies to our souls, earth to heaven, time to eternity, is not only determining wildly and at random, but is really judging backwards, and deciding in opposition to common sense.

Whatever our thoughts or resolutions may be at present, the time will come, when we shall covet beyond all things, and value above all price, a stock of virtue, and a fund of good works; when we had rather *abound* in these, than possess all the treasures of the *Indies*, or even *gain the whole world*. For in them will consist both our title to the happiness of heaven and our qualifications for it. In fine, when all
other

other possessions are become useless, worthless, and even contemptible, these will abide the grand test, procure us admission into the mansions of glory, and render us meet partakers of an everlasting inheritance.

Whatsoever our thoughts or resolutions may be at present, the time will come, when we shall look beyond all things, and value above all price, a flock of witness, and a fund of good works; when we had rather abound in these, than possess all the treasures of the land, or even gain the whole world. For in these will consist both our title to the happiness of heaven, and our qualification for it. In fine, when all other

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S E R M O N XIX.

Preached on Good-Friday.

H E B. XII. Part of the 2d Verse.

Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame.—

IN order to apprehend rightly the meaning of these words, it will be requisite to inquire and consider what we are to understand by the *joy* here spoken of; what the powerful motive was, which prompted our Lord to undertake the arduous work of our redemption, and which supported and animated him in the accomplishment of it. Whatever it was, doubtless it must have been a motive of vast force, which could lead him through a course of the direst and most dreadful sufferings, and make him
endure

endure the cross, despising the shame. And to this most painful and ignominious death, we may add the various hardships and distresses of his life; the humble condition he chose, the mortifications he submitted to, and all the insults and indignities he bore, patiently and cheerfully, during his whole ministry.—Led, I suppose, partly by the context, and partly by some other passages in the New Testament, the generality of interpreters have taken it for granted, that the motive mentioned in my text was our Saviour's personal advancement, even the subsequent honours and powers conferred on him, and his exaltation at the right hand of God. Nevertheless, if we carefully attend to the great end of our redemption, and to the divine character of our Redeemer, we shall find unanswerable objections to this interpretation. We know assuredly, that *Christ* came into the world, not for his own sake, but for ours; not with a view to his own advancement, but to promote God's glory, and the salvation of mankind. And though, in consequence of his high merit and dignity, he was actually raised to the forementioned honours, yet it does by no means follow, that he was thereby principally influenced and excited to do and suffer what he

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he did. And indeed, such a conclusion is very unsuitable to the sublime character of our Redeemer; the purity and perfection of which will not suffer us to entertain any doubt of his acting from the noblest motives, and on the most generous and disinterested principle, as will further be shewn afterwards. — Rejecting, therefore, this construction, as injurious to his honour, and derogating from the perfection of his conduct, let us proceed to inquire what that *joy* really was which my text speaks of; and which is there represented as our Saviour's grand motive, and indeed his principal support and consolation; which lightened the burden of his sufferings, and enabled him to undergo them with greater alacrity.

As to which, it may, I think, be safely concluded, that the *joy* here spoken of arose, not from a private, but a public cause; even from a prospect of that mighty good which our Saviour was procuring for a whole race of rational creatures; of that inestimable benefit which was to redound to all mankind; that is, to all workers of righteousness, and all true and sincere penitents, over the face of the whole earth. For let us not weakly imagine, that the blessings of redemption were partially dispensed, and even
confined

confined and appropriated to actual believers: it is evident, both from reason and scripture, that they were universally to extend to all proper objects; that is, to all true penitents, whensoever existing, and wheresoever dispersed, through the whole world. For in every age, and in every nation, they who feared God, and wrought righteousness, were sure to be accepted, through the merits of *Christ*, on practicable terms; I mean, on such conditions as Providence should put in their power; which actual faith in *Christ* was not, we know, to a great majority in all ages.—But to return: The benefits of *Christ's* redemption being thus universal, it is not to be doubted, but the view of so great and extensive a good must affect him in an extraordinary manner, and produce in such a mind as his the highest satisfaction and complacency. How divine a pleasure must it give him to obtain impunity, and peace, and pardon, for all penitent sinners! to save a sinking world, to reduce a lost race, to relieve a perishing species; to rescue them from the doom of death and destruction, bring them back into the way of truth and life, and even purchase for them an everlasting happiness! Such were the great and godlike ends which he proposed to effect, and which he pursued from first to last by the
fittest

fittest and most efficacious means; by his heavenly doctrines, and most pure precepts, by his perfect example, and his transcendent merits. Of this blessed work he knew and foresaw the speedy accomplishment; and the prospect thereof could not fail to afford him, not only the truest comfort, but the most inconceivable delight.

To support and strengthen the foregoing explication, let us consider somewhat further, and more distinctly, how eminently and peculiarly suitable such a motive was to the state and character, and the divine disposition of our Redeemer. Whatever external glories were deserved by him, and accordingly conferred on him, good reason we have to suppose, and be assured, that he had far nobler aims, and more generous views, than his own personal grandeur and exaltation, as was before observed. Private views and interested motives may be, and are, on several accounts, very requisite, and very proper for frail and degenerate men; and more especially so under severe trials and temptations. Nor are the merit and virtue of their good actions lost, however they may be lessened by aiming at their own future advantage and felicity. This is evident from fact, and the whole tenor of the gospel dispensation; which sets before us

this motive in the strongest light, and demands our continual attention to it. We find it every where applying to our hopes and fears; inviting and encouraging us to virtue and obedience by the promise of a glorious reward, and deterring us from sin and wickedness by severe and solemn threats, and all the terrors of divine vengeance. And this was highly requisite, or rather absolutely necessary. It appeared too evidently, from sad experience, that other motives were generally ineffectual, and for the most part indeed quite overlooked. The bulk of mankind were not to be moved, not to be touched by the reasonableness of doing their duty; by the beauty of virtue, and the amiable nature of worthy actions. But they might, and many of them would, be excited by considerations of interest, by the springs of hope and fear, and the powerful principles of happiness and misery. And even on these principles to become obedient, and embrace their duty, is truly laudable and virtuous; though, it must be confessed, in a lower degree. To resist the solicitations of sin and sense, to restrain fierce appetites, and mortify corrupt affections, from a regard to future safety and welfare, to distant enjoyments, and invisible advantages, and those of a pure and more

spiritual nature, is a conduct really meritorious. This is evident in itself, and still more so on the foregoing account: for certainly the divine dispensation of the gospel could never contain, never offer to mankind, such motives as would undermine virtue, and destroy the worth of moral actions and religious duties. It is not therefore to be doubted but christianity may be, and indeed ought to be, a beneficial as well as a *reasonable service*; and the discharge of our duty will be acceptable to God, though we do it on the principle of self-security and natural good.

—But though such a conduct be allowed either truly moral, or truly religious; yet it is neither the one nor the other in perfection. A perfectly good action is chosen and done on its own account, and without any regard to the interest of the agent; and the ground or principle of it is merely a love of truth and rectitude. As this is the noblest and purest motive in the world, so it is most divine. For God himself is influenced entirely by it in all his actions. This we conclude with greater assurance, because he is utterly incapable of receiving, and therefore of proposing, any advantage to himself. For what interest, what benefit, what addition of good can possibly accrue to him, whose fruitions

are full, and his felicity absolutely perfect? Certain therefore it is, that he is, and must needs be, wholly disinterested in all his good and gracious dispensations to his creatures. On them he is pouring benefits continually, and immensely, without any prospect of return, or any possibility of advantage to himself.

This then is goodness divine, and in its greatest and highest perfection; and thus pure it perpetually flows from him, who is the great source and fountain of both. Since therefore such is the nature of God's goodness, can we doubt of its being imitated and copied out by the Son of God, *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person*? Would not he be willing and desirous, in conformity to his Father's example, to do good for goodness sake? And must not this pure and sublime motive have influenced him more than any private prospects, or personal considerations? He requires even his frail disciples to be *perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect*: that is, for it can mean no more, to imitate and resemble him to the utmost of their power. And most sure we are, he would never give them a precept not fully observed, and perfectly practised by himself. For in every instance he acted as he taught, and exemplified

exemplified his own rules. His goodness therefore to mankind, and all the inestimable services which he did them, must, without question, have been unmercenary and disinterested: nor can we suppose otherwise, without depreciating his merits, diminishing the perfection of his character, and derogating from the glory of his conduct.

Let it be further considered and inquired, whether such a motive was not peculiarly agreeable to that generous zeal, that boundless benevolence which appeared in all our Saviour's actions and proceedings. How active, how extensive, how unwearied, were his endeavours for the service and salvation of mankind! *Glory to God*, and *good-will towards men*, were his darling principles, which possessed his heart, and engrossed his affections; on which all his thoughts were fixed, and all his cares centred. The pursuit of them was not only his joy and pleasure, but his very support and sustenance. How indefatigably did he seek and search for all opportunities of doing good! converting the most ordinary incidents and occurrences of life into occasions of bounty and benefaction. The numberless miracles which he wrought, though primarily intended as proofs of his mission, were, at the same time, pledges of his

good-will, and demonstrations of his love. His ardent zeal for the salvation of men's souls was accompanied with a kind care, and a tender concern for the safety and welfare of their bodies. He gave ears to the deaf, eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, health to the sick, and even life to the dead. His favours and blessings descended promiscuously, like *rain* from heaven, *on the just and on the unjust*, on the grateful and the ungrateful. The *contradiction of sinners*, and the clamours and calumnies of malicious men, produced no other sentiments in him, than those of grief and pity. Base and impious as they were, they could never be more ready to do evil, than he always was to do good; and their greatest injuries and indignities met with no other return than his prayers and benedictions. The worst treatment they could give him was never capable of alienating his affection, or obstructing his kindness; and his greatest grief was, that he could not thereby melt them into repentance. But, alas! instead of being mollified by such invincible goodness, they became the more exasperated; and the more he strove to soften their hearts, the harder they grew. The result of which was, that, in spite of all his good offices, and miraculous services, they persecuted him even unto

unto death; a death preceded and attended by every possible circumstance of shame and grief. That heavenly benefactor, who came into the world on purpose to redeem and rescue it from ruin, must die, it seems, to accomplish it; must die too a most painful and ignominious death, and by their hands whom he came to save! For that life and liberty, that pardon and peace, which he came to procure them, behold! he receives in return bonds, buffetings, and stripes, the sentence of a malefactor, and the sufferings and death of a slave. All this, and infinitely more than has been said, or can be said, our Saviour *endured*, and even *despised*, for our sakes. And the principle on which he acted was pure pity, free benevolence, and disinterested goodness. This, if I mistake not, is the doctrine of my text, as I have been endeavouring to shew.—The proper uses to be made of this doctrine, though plain and obvious, are too important to be quite omitted.

First, then, since the deliverance and salvation of mankind was the great end proposed by our Saviour, and the *joy* thence arising his chief motive for the accomplishment of it; since he was so firmly attached to our interest, and so intensely zealous for our welfare, that no difficulties or dangers could deter him

from the pursuit of it; since, moreover, the foresight of our happiness was so pleasing to him, as to lighten his heavy burden, and make him cheerfully endure the bitterest indignities, and sharpest sorrows; what obligations do we lie under for such amazing goodness; and with what sentiments of gratitude ought our hearts to be filled! Is it not manifest, that he made our advantage his own, and sacrificed himself to set us free? Was not his whole life a scene of adversity and suffering, and his death terrible beyond all conception? Under these pressures, his comfort, his joy, was, that he was going to redeem a lost world; to exalt a race of wretched creatures, slaves to sin and corruption, *to the glorious liberty of the sons of God.* In the midst of his grief and anguish, when he was exceeding sorrowful, and sick unto death, this was his cordial. How shall we ever think or speak with due praise, or sufficient thankfulness, of such a benefactor? Most certain it is, that we ought to do both much and often, and with all our might. Less than this will be great injustice, and grievous ingratitude. Such unspeakable grace and goodness, so undeserved, and so impossible to be requited, ought to affect us in a peculiar manner, and make deep and durable impressions on our hearts,

hearts. We are bound to commemorate such a friend; to celebrate such friendship; to acknowledge such mercies and favours, in all the proper ways we can think of; and more especially in that way which was appointed by himself; appointed to prevent our minds from sliding into insensibility and forgetfulness; to keep alive and cultivate our gratitude to our Redeemer, and our benevolence and charity to our fellow-creatures. Such an ordinance may be abused (and what is it that men do not abuse?) by irreverence on one hand, and superstition on the other; but in itself it stands clear of all just exception; is perfectly rational, and peculiarly useful, in promoting the ends above mentioned. But,

Secondly, since our safety and felicity were so dear in the sight of our Redeemer, that he was willing to purchase them at any rate, and submitted to all sorts of hardships and distresses on that very account; surely it behoves us to take special heed, that we do not, as far as in us lies, frustrate his kindness, and disappoint his love. He came not into the world to redeem obstinate and impenitent sinners; that was impossible, whatever he had done, or whatever he had suffered. To persist therefore in sinful courses, and wicked habits, is not only treachery against ourselves, and
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our own interest; but it is perfidiousness and ingratitude towards our deliverer. By continuing in this wretched way, and repeating our sins and transgressions, we *crucify the Son of God afresh*, as the apostle expresses it; and *put him to open shame*. We not only lessen his triumphs, and diminish his joy, but turn it into grief. Whatever he has done, and whatever he has endured, is all lost on hardened sinners; in respect of whom he both lived and died in vain. On the other hand, the conversion and reformation of every sinner extends our Redeemer's conquest, and is a real addition to his joy. By how much the number of penitent converts is increased, to so much better and nobler purpose did he suffer; and in the same proportion must his satisfaction be augmented. On these accounts, besides the extreme folly and impiety of an impenitent course, there is, we see, a peculiar baseness and malignity therein, which greatly aggravates the guilt of incorrigible sinners, and must proportionably increase their condemnation.

Thirdly, and lastly, since our blessed Saviour lived and died in our behalf, and accomplished our redemption in so free and disinterested a manner; since, moreover, he is our great pattern, and *left us an example that we should*

should follow his steps; it is certainly incumbent on us to imitate him, even in this respect, as far as we are able. We cannot indeed pretend to be wholly governed by his divine motive, his generous principle; but ordinarily it must operate in some measure, and produce a good effect on our minds, if we will give it leave: for good and virtuous actions are amiable in their own nature, and as such would not fail to recommend themselves; and, it is to be hoped, often do so, where no considerable temptation draws against them. Where duty alone cannot prevail, by all means let us hearken to interest; and well it is for us, that the cause of virtue is seconded and supported by so powerful an advocate. But yet it may deserve to be considered, whether over-looking our interest be not sometimes the most effectual way to promote it. All our hopes depend on God's favour and approbation; and the more we strive to imitate him, doubtless the fairer is our prospect. As then nothing is more opposite to his nature, nothing more odious in his sight, than a selfish and sordid disposition; so nothing is, or can be, more acceptable to him, than an open heart, a public spirit, and a beneficent conduct. And, moreover, it brings a peculiar reward along with it,

it, and yields the purest and noblest enjoyments. In short, true benevolence and charity are happiness in hand, and heaven in reversion. And the more disinterested it is, the more favour and bliss it procures, improving, advancing, and perfecting men's minds here, and entitling them more abundantly to a blessed and glorious inheritance hereafter.

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S E R M O N XX.

Preached on *Whit-Sunday*.

PHILIP. II. 13.

*For it is God which worketh in you, both to will
and to do, of his good pleasure.*

THE apostle, in the foregoing part of the chapter, having exhorted the *Philippians* to unanimity and lowliness of mind, and pressed them to the latter from the example of *Christ's* great humiliation and condescension, in accomplishing the great work for which he came into the world; proceeds, at the 12th verse, to confirm their minds, and quicken their endeavours in the discharge of their whole duty. Having acknowledged the goodness of their disposition, and the sincerity of their former obedience; he urges them to

to perseverance, and higher degrees of care and zeal. *Work out, says he, your own salvation with fear and trembling.* That is, not a superstitious fear, and a scrupulous anxiety; but a vigilant concern, a pious awe, and a humble reverence; equally removed from the extremes of presumption and distrust. Then follow the words of my text: *For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.*

These words have been much and often misinterpreted. Many Christians have understood them in such a sense, as is neither consistent with the dictates of reason, nor the doctrines of revelation. They have supposed them to signify the absolute effects of God's grace, and the irresistible influences of his holy spirit, even in ordinary cases, and upon common occasions. They have concluded from hence, that he is the sole agent in the affair of men's salvation; the efficient cause of every good action; and that, without any real concurrence of theirs, the faith and obedience of the elect are entirely produced by his operations.—If this were true, there could be no such thing as virtue or religion among Christians. Precepts and prohibitions, promises and threats, would signify nothing; and duty and obligation would be words without

without any meaning. In this case, man would be a mere passive instrument; wholly directed, moved, actuated by a foreign power; and, by consequence, his best performances would be, in a moral sense, altogether worthless. For what praise could we deserve for those actions to which we contributed nothing? actions which were not ours, but were produced in us merely by the power and operation of an invisible agent? The growth of a plant, or the gravitation of a stone, would be equally laudable and meritorious. In short, on several accounts this doctrine cannot possibly be true; and therefore neither is, nor can be, the meaning of any text in Scripture.—This being premised, I shall proceed to inquire,

First, what is the true sense of the words before us, and the real doctrine contained in them. And,

Secondly, what use we are to make of that doctrine.

First, I am to inquire into the true sense of the words, and the real doctrine contained in them. *It is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.* That is, you are, and must be, many ways indebted to him for the discharge of your duty, and the success of your endeavours. He is the au-
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that of every perfect gift, and the promoter of every good work. Without his aids and assistances you can neither work out your salvation, nor do any thing towards it. His help you stand in need of at all times, and upon all occasions; and his concurrence is necessary from first to last. This, in general, must be allowed to be meant by the declaration in my text; and its connexion with the foregoing words is as follows: *Work out your own salvation*, in a firm and faithful reliance on the succours of Heaven, which are freely granted, and will never fail you, if ye be not wanting to yourselves. But work it out *with fear and trembling*; that is, with humility and reverence, care and circumspection; because ye *are not sufficient of yourselves to do any thing as of yourselves; but your sufficiency is of God.*—Still the question is, how the *working* here spoken of, the exerting of our own endeavours, is consistent with the expressions in my text; wherein every thing seems ascribed to God. If he *work in us, both to will and to do*, what is it that we pretend to? What part, what share, can belong to us, in the accomplishment of our salvation?—In order therefore to solve this difficulty, and to give a more particular and distinct account of the doctrine before us; I shall endeavour to separate the divine and the human; and to shew, as briefly as I can,

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what is to be ascribed to God, and what to man, in the performance of our duty. For it is evident, from the whole tenor of Scripture, that both are to be taken in. If God did all, and man nothing, how absurd would it be to call upon him to work out his own salvation! On the other hand, if man did every thing, and stood entirely on his own bottom; what room could there be for the doctrine of grace, or what possible meaning could be found out for such expressions as those in my text? Since then there is doubtless a joint efficiency, a co-operation of God and man; our business will be to find out, as near as we can, the bounds and limits of each agency; and to discover what is to be attributed to the first cause, and what to the second. And though it may not be in our power to distinguish precisely their several operations, or discern exactly where they meet and coincide; yet probably we may go as far as is requisite to answer any useful end, though not the purposes of curiosity.—Let it be observed then, that men's good works and virtuous actions may be, in a great measure, justly ascribed to God in the following respects, and on the following accounts:

First, As all their powers, abilities, and faculties, were originally derived from him,

and are continually exercised in dependence on his support and preservation; as he endued us with them at first, so he upholds them every moment. *In him we live, and move, and have our beings.* All our thoughts, words, and actions, though immediately subject to our own wills, are yet mediately the effects of his power and providence. Whatever we may do or design, we can only work under him; without whose influence we could neither act, nor exist. As therefore God is the original author, and the perpetual preserver of those powers and abilities by which we work; he may properly be said to work in us in every thing that we do, sin only excepted; which is a voluntary abuse and perversion of his gifts, entirely owing to ourselves.——But,

Secondly, As all men have understandings and wills, reason and liberty, given them by the Creator; so Christians have many additional helps and privileges, which they ought constantly to ascribe and acknowledge to the Donor. More particularly he enlightens our minds by the revelation of his will, and the communications of his holy spirit. The gospel is a system of all needful truths, and contains a full account of our several duties and obligations. It is completely fitted for
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our instruction in righteousness, that we may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Whatever we owe to our Creator, our fellow-creatures, or ourselves; whatever is due to friends, families, communities; whatever is becoming in the several stations and relations of life; is plainly and clearly set forth in the gospel. It also communicates to us true ideas, and just conceptions of the divine nature; and directs us to imitate and serve God in the purity of truth, and all the beauty of holiness. If then we consult, and search, as we ought, this treasure of divine wisdom; we shall have a clear light constantly shining in our minds, and shewing us the way in which we are to walk.

—But, besides the benefits of this standing revelation, God is pleased further to enlighten our understandings by the immediate manifestations of his spirit; not such as were extraordinarily and miraculously conferred on the Apostles, and first Christians, to enable them to plant and propagate the gospel; but such gifts of the manifold grace of God, as are ordinarily given to every man to profit withal. The manner and measure of these operations we cannot presume to determine; but the reality of them is most evident from Scripture, which frequently makes mention of these di-

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vine illuminations. Whether they consist in recalling to our minds those important truths which we are so apt to forget, and imprinting them more deeply in our memories; or in placing our ideas in such an order, and such a light, as may give us clearer views than we naturally should have; or in strengthening and improving our perceptive faculties; is in vain to inquire, and needless to conjecture. But,

Thirdly, God operates in our minds, and influences our wills, by setting before us such motives of action as are the strongest and most powerful in the world; by threatening the severest penalties to evil-doers, and promising the highest rewards to them that obey him; by revealing his wrath, in the most remarkable manner, against all unrighteousness; and his eternal favour and loving-kindness to all his faithful servants. As in the former case we are brought to the knowledge of our duty, and the internal reasons and obligations belonging to it; so we are here excited to the practice of it by external considerations, and it is bound upon us by the most weighty and prevailing sanctions that we are capable of conceiving. Those rational inducements, and these motives of interest, propounded in the gospel, and pressed upon

us by the Holy Spirit, are continually working on our minds with united force; unless we prevent it by wilfully stifling all thoughts of them, and hardening our hearts against the impressions of both. It is not possible to imagine any thing more powerful, or more likely to influence our wills; and whenever these fail, the mind is incurably corrupt, and the case desperate. We cannot, in the very nature of the thing, be *driven* into our duty; and if we will not be *drawn*, we know the consequence. Be drawn, I mean, by *the cords of a man*, as the Scripture expresses it; that is, by considerations either of reason or interest. If we refuse to do our duty, though we know it to be right and fit in itself, and that our welfare, temporal and eternal, depends upon it, we violate the strongest obligations, and break in funder the strictest bonds that heaven or earth can lay upon us.

Fourthly, and lastly, God works on our minds by exciting or calming our affections. These affections were planted in our natures, to quicken us in the pursuit of proper objects, and stimulate us to our duty; to engage us in laudable designs, and make us active and steady in the execution of them. And when, by the corruptions of nature, and the prevalence of irregular customs, they are become

languid and faint, God is pleased to add new life and strength to them by the operations of his holy spirit; which is never wanting to our assistance, till we quench or drive it away by obstinacy and incorrigible perverseness. Or when, on the other hand, by neglect and indulgence, they are become immoderate and excessive; we are assisted by the same spirit in rectifying them, and reducing them to their proper bounds. Not that our affections are governed to our hands, and ourselves exempted from the care and the charge of them; but that his concurrence may be depended on, and is never withdrawn till we forfeit it by the abuse of it.

Thus then it appears how, and in what respects, *God works in us to will and to do*; and what share may properly be ascribed to him in the production of good works, and the performance of our duty. He does not diminish our liberty, much less over-rule our wills, or act in our stead; but he influences them in a moral way, and attracts them by suitable considerations. He first gives us proper powers and faculties, and then invites us to make a right use of them; by setting before us the strongest motives, and most effectual inducements. He works on our minds by arguments and exhortations; by
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the light of his truth, and the illuminations of his spirit; by presenting to our view the reasonableness of our duty, and the intrinsic excellence of virtue and goodness; by offering the greatest rewards, and threatening the heaviest punishments: and, in a word, by all such means and methods as are consistent with the liberty of our minds, and the freedom of our wills.

And from hence it is easy to discover what remains on our part, and what is incumbent on us to do for ourselves. When God has given us power and ability, acquainted us with our duty, and afforded us all possible assistance and encouragement for the doing of it; he requires of us, as well he may, to exert our powers, and act accordingly. His province is to enable us for the discharge of our duty, and to work on us by all fit motives: ours is to be willing to follow whither he leads us, and to comply with his righteous demands. When, on his part, every thing is done that ought to be done, and all fit means and motives offered; to us it belongs to deliberate, choose, determine, act. Nothing is more absurd than to imagine, that he should determine our wills, or be the immediate efficient cause of our actions. For then they would

not be *our* actions, but *his*. He would be the sole agent, and we nothing more than mere passive instruments.—Nor, strictly speaking, can he be said to co-operate with us in this respect. It seems impossible, that one and the same action should be produced by two several agents, and be both divine and human. An action of any kind is a simple, uncompounded, indivisible thing; and therefore cannot be ascribed to more agents than one. In truth and propriety, whatever is done by God, cannot be the action of man; and whatever is done by man, cannot be the action of God. He may, and does, work on our wills by various influences of a moral nature; but to do it in the way of natural efficiency, seems to be utterly inconsistent with the powers he has given us, and the duty he expects from us. Instead of working in us to will and to do; this would be depriving us of our wills, and putting it out of our power to do any thing. In short, as self-determination is essential to liberty; if our minds be free, they must have a power of choosing and acting: and since no action can be truly and properly ascribed to more than one agent; whatever is really willed and done by us, must be solely our volition, and our action. Though

the power and means of action, and the reasons for acting, be derived from God, and must ever be thankfully ascribed to him; yet whatever, in consequence thereof, we determine, or do, we are, immediately, the true efficient, and the sole agents.

Notwithstanding then the various workings of God, we may plainly apprehend what, and how it is that we are to work in the accomplishment of our salvation. *Will-ing* and *doing* belong to us; nor are they wrought in our minds otherwise than by such moral applications, as we have been considering. Whatever be the operations of the spirit, or the productions of grace; it seems most evident, that man's free-agency is ever left entire and undiminished. However our understandings may be enlightened, or our affections regulated; our wills and actions are, in all ordinary cases, left to our own determination. — We retain our original liberty, and continue masters and governors of our own conduct. We are, in thought, word, and deed, at our own disposal; and, on that very account, are answerable for our behaviour in all these respects. Without such a power, such a liberty, we could not possibly be called upon to work out our own salvation in any sense: neither could

could we be qualified for that state of trial wherein we are placed.——Thus we see the declaration in my text is perfectly consistent with the exhortation immediately foregoing; and the doctrine contained in both is briefly this: God enables our minds, enlightens our understandings, purifies our affections, and excites us to will and to do what is good, by moral means, and all proper motives: in virtue of such abilities, assistances, and encouragements, man wills and acts; exerts his faculties, puts forth his endeavours, and thereby *works out his own salvation*. I proceed,

Secondly, To shew, in a few words, what use we are to make of the doctrine thus explained. And, *First*, since we stand in such need of the succours of Heaven, and depend on them in so many respects, we can have no grounds for presumption and security. *Let him that thinketh he standeth*, says the apostle, *take heed lest he fall*. 'Tis true, we have liberty, and a power of acting according to the free resolutions of our own mind: but nevertheless so frail are our wills, and so feeble our resolutions, that we scarce know how to trust them. When we imagine them firm, and well fixed; how soon are they shaken, and how easily unsettled!

Many of our purposes and determinations are so weak and wavering, that almost any little accident breaks them; so light and volatile, that the least blast of temptation sweeps them away, and carries them out of sight. The best men, by confiding too much in themselves, have remarkably failed, and become signal examples of human infirmity. *Though I die with thee*, said the sanguine disciple to his master, *I will not deny thee*. But what was the event? Did he hold fast his integrity? So far from it, that no sooner was he brought to the test, than he denied him again and again, and backed his denial with falsehood and perjury. Thus his confidence and his boasting ended in shame, and sorrow, and bitter repentance. Just reason then have we, not only for care and circumspection, but great humility and self-distrust; to be jealous of our own minds, and diffident of our own strength; to implore the assistance of our heavenly Patron, who, *knowing our frame, and remembering that we are but dust*, is ever ready, ever willing, to hear our prayers, and help our infirmities. And therefore,

Secondly, As we ought not to presume, so we need not despond. If we find good cause

cause to apprehend, and fear our own frailties; it behoves us to consider who is our helper, and what succour we may expect from him. If our weakness, and folly, and vanity, be very great; his wisdom, and power, and strength, are much greater. He can at any time either guard us from temptation, or deliver us out of it, or enable us to bear, and conquer it. Abundantly sufficient are his aids for all our wants and defects. — But though God is pleased to *strengthen us with his might*, and make us *able* to do our duty; yet who shall make us *willing*? I answer, that God *inclines* us continually by the means and methods above mentioned; but, after all, as we are free agents, we must choose and determine for ourselves. If, notwithstanding God is pleased, with so much goodness, mercy, and long-suffering, to draw us to our duty, and lead us to our happiness, we will not comply, will not follow; if we reject his offers, refuse his invitations, and neglect his helps, I know no remedy. This would be making our case desperate indeed. For as it is an utter impossibility that we should be rendered good and virtuous by compulsion; so to bless us without virtue, and save us without goodness,

ness, is a direct contradiction to the nature of God, and all his attributes.

Thirdly, and lastly, We may discover, from what has been said, how necessary it is carefully to consider, and keep in mind, the great truths of religion. It is in vain to imagine, that the grace of God should ever open those eyes which are wilfully shut; or illuminate those minds which are industriously barred up against light and truth. If we have ears to hear, and yet will not hear; what can avail the voice of inspiration, or the sound of the gospel? If we have eyes, and will not see; understandings, and will not think; the light of heaven is lost upon us. Neither the doctrines of revelation, nor the operations of the spirit, can have any effect in minds thus disposed. The promises and threats, the glories and terrors, of the Almighty, must lose all their force, in respect of those who never consider them, but take pains to keep them out of their thoughts. In short, if we thus harden our hearts, and hide our understandings; no methods can profit us, no means reach us. On the other hand, if we open our minds to instruction, and meditate often on the great truths of the gospel; they will contribute

bute most powerfully to the gaining of our wills; and, by the help of God's holy spirit, form in us a right judgment, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation.

S E R M O N XXI.

Preached in the Time of the Rebellion, in
the Year 1745.

LUKE XII. 57.

*Yea, and why, even of yourselves, judge ye not
what is right?*

OUR blessed Saviour is here reproofing the
Jews for the hardness of their hearts,
and the wilful blindness of their understand-
ings. He tells them in the foregoing verses,
that they were sufficiently careful, as well as
skilful, in discerning the signs and appear-
ances of nature; but as to the signs of the
Messiah's coming, they were very short and
negligent in their inquiries: fearing, as we
have reason to suppose, lest they should be
convinced of an unwelcome and disagreeable
truth.

truth. *Ye hypocrites*, says he, *ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth; but how is it, that ye do not discern this time?* Then follow the words of my text; *yea, and why, even of ourselves, judge ye not what is right?*—This expostulation, though immediately directed to the *Jews* only, and on a particular occasion; yet, considered in itself, plainly exhibits two general doctrines of great and universal importance.

First, The one is, the use of man's reason and judgment in points of faith, and matters of religion. For since our Lord blamed the *Jews* for neglecting, or overlooking, the proofs of his authority, and the evidences of his mission; and since they could not examine these proofs and evidences without exercising their reason, and passing judgment, as will presently be shewn; it clearly follows, that men are not only allowed, but obliged to make use of their understandings, in order to satisfy themselves concerning the grounds of their religion. For certainly if the *Jews* might and ought to have judged for this purpose, other men may and ought to do the same; it being absurd to suppose, that the use of reason should ever be confined, or unequally indulged among men, whom God has universally blessed with that faculty.

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There is no opinion which does more disservice, and more dishonour to religion, than that which removes reason from it, and sets them at variance. Though reason and revelation be derived to us by different ways, yet they have both the same divine Author; and therefore cannot possibly interfere, or disagree. And indeed revelation supposes reason, and is built upon it; in so much that its principles and plain dictates are not communicated to us, but taken for granted in holy writ. Moreover, we find the Scriptures expressly enjoining men the use and exercise of their reason. Thus God is represented as calling upon his people, in a very familiar manner, *to come and reason with him concerning their duty*; and elsewhere he is said to *have a controversy with his people*: thus appealing, as it were, from his own authority and majesty to the reason and judgment of mankind, in respect of the truth and equity of his laws. We may further take notice, how the word of God submits itself to be examined and tried by human understanding. Thus Christians are required *to try the spirits*, and *to prove all things*; and the *Berians* are much commended for examining the apostle's doctrines, and comparing them with former revelations. In short, the apostle expressly calls the religion

of the gospel a *reasonable service*; and therefore, on all these accounts, it is most absurd to imagine, that a due use of reason is either unlawful or unnecessary in matters of religion. It has indeed its limits and bounds, which ought not to be transgressed; but to represent it as injurious or dangerous to revealed religion, is disparaging both: and whoever pretends to exclude the former, undermines the latter; which never can, nor never could, be established without it. Even they who lived in the same age with *Christ* and his apostles, and were eye-witnesses of those facts and proofs which support Christianity, could not be satisfied on just grounds, without a previous exercise of their reason and judgment.

One great evidence of the truth of Christianity, was the accomplishment of Scripture-prophecies. The prophets had exactly described the person of the *Messiah*, and particularly set forth the several parts of his character. By this character, and those descriptions, the *Jews* were to know him when he arrived: and accordingly those among them, who are faithful and impartial, did know him by these prophetic marks, and readily received him as the undoubted *Messiah*. But then this manifestly supposes the use of reason, and the exercise of judgment; without which

which they could not possibly examine the agreement of his character and circumstances with those prophetic descriptions. What they then saw, must be compared with what they had heard and read out of the prophets, in order to discover whether, and how far, the one was applicable to the other.

Another main support of the truth of the gospel, was the many and mighty *miracles* wrought in confirmation thereof. But even this proof, strong as it was, could be no proof at all to the spectators, unless they used their understandings, as well as their senses. It was not enough to see strange works, and unusual operations; they must unavoidably consider, and judge, whether those works really exceeded the natural powers of the agents; without which, however strange and uncommon they might seem, they could have been no real miracles. Besides, neither was this inquiry of itself sufficient: for they might have been real miracles, and yet perhaps wrought by evil spirits, of power superior to human; and therefore this point likewise necessarily required examination and distinction.

In order hereto, the *doctrines* of our Saviour and his apostles were also to be weighed and considered, that it might ap-

pear, whether they were worthy of a divine prophet, and a heavenly mission. Without this there could be no security or satisfaction. For no miracles could establish the credit of any teacher, if he taught false or immoral doctrines: since, in this case, it would be evident, that he could not possibly have any commission from above. On the other hand, if the doctrines were not only pure and unexceptionable, but remarkably good and excellent; eminently conducive to the glory of God, and the peace and prosperity of mankind; the miracles which accompanied them must have their weight, and even receive from them additional force and confirmation. In short, the miracles and doctrines would mutually support and strengthen each other, and bear unquestionable marks of divine authority. But how then should men arrive at such a conclusion, or discover any such rule, without exercising their understandings and judgments? They must inevitably and perpetually be exposed to the grossest errors and delusions, and lie at the mercy of every impostor. But further, if the use of reason was necessary, even for those who were cotemporary with *Christ* and his apostles, in order to their conviction and satisfaction; much more is it so now in these latter ages, when men are at
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so great a distance from the origin of christianity. For the truth of our religion manifestly depends on the authority of the Scriptures. Of this authority we may indeed find, on a proper inquiry, clear and strong proof. But how? Certainly by the use of reason and judgment, and not otherwise. For though it chiefly relies on testimony, the concurrent testimony of primitive Christians, receiving the same Scriptures, and transmitting them down to us with universal consent; yet even the force of this evidence cannot be estimated, or weighed, without a rational discussion; and, by consequence, we cannot otherwise discover on what grounds our faith is built.

The principal consideration is yet behind. It is in vain for men to satisfy themselves concerning the authority of the Scriptures, except they also understand the sense of them: nor will it avail any thing to know who dictated, or who penned the words, unless we also learn what they mean. And how can this possibly be done, without examining, considering, reasoning, judging? Must we absolutely rely on traditional interpretation, and follow implicitly the judgment of our forefathers? This must needs be a very insecure and precarious rule. We know, that the Scriptures were wretchedly perverted for

many ages together by the universal church; which was fallen into the grossest errors, and most grievous corruptions. And if we go back, even to the first and purest ages, though we may find them clear of corruption, yet by no means free from error; many of their interpretations being now disapproved, and universally rejected. This rule, therefore, we cannot adhere to with any safety, and therefore must unavoidably have recourse to the other. We must explain the Scripture by itself, and by reason; comparing one part with another, and suiting our interpretations, as near as we can, to the scope and tenour of the whole: particularly regarding that sense, which seems to arise most naturally from the words themselves; and, wherever the words will admit of it, preferring that construction which appears most worthy of Scripture, and most conformable to the unprejudiced dictates of our own minds. From hence, therefore, it is manifest, that reason is absolutely necessary for the understanding of revelation; and indeed without these helps which it affords us, it is impossible we should have a well-grounded faith. In short, to set aside reason, is to render revelation quite useless, which can neither be discovered nor understood without it.

Secondly, Thus far we have been considering

ing that part of the question, *why judge ye not what is right?* But we find something further expressed, which demands our notice and attention. For thus the whole question runs; *Why, EVEN OF YOURSELVES, judge ye not what is right?* This then is the second point that I proposed to speak of; which, as far as it related particularly to the *Jews*, seems to warn them against placing their confidence in the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*; those blind leaders, who would neither embrace it themselves, nor suffer others to be influenced by it; who had miserably perverted *the law and the prophets*, and explained them according to their own froward humours and corrupt inclinations. The body of the *Jews* are therefore here directed to beware of their false glosses; and, instead of following blindfold the conclusions of these men, to consult the reason of their own minds, and judge for themselves.—But if we consider this clause in my text as relating to mankind in general, and more especially Christians, it seems to be still a strong caution against implicit faith. That is, it requires them to make use of their own faculties, and not be led, at all adventures, by the dictates and directions of others. Since God has given all men reason and understanding, he undoubtedly expects that

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they exercise, and employ it, according to the measure of their abilities and opportunities. Not that they should lean too hard, or lay an immoderate stress on their own understandings, neither rely wholly on themselves, especially in matters above their reach, or concerning which they are not sufficiently qualified to judge. In this case suspense and diffidence are most becoming; and, in all cases, sobriety and caution, and a due regard to information and instruction. However men may be qualified, they should never want a disposition to use proper helps, and let in light from all quarters. But nevertheless they ought to exercise and exert their own faculties, and not be blindly governed by authority. For authority is not light, neither does it tend to produce it: so far from it, that it generally keeps it out, and shuts up men's minds in ignorance and darkness. — The whole duty of a Christian is a *reasonable service*, as I before observed. As far, therefore, as faith is voluntary, it must rest on the same foundation. And indeed no part of our duty can be acceptable to God, any further than it is rational. For he hath no pleasure in *the sacrifice of fools*, neither delighteth he in the servitude and subjection of human understandings. Christians should always be ready
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to give a reason of their faith, as well as their hope: otherwise their faith must needs be irrational, and ill-grounded. When a man examines and weighs what he believes, and his conviction is founded on evidence, such a proceeding is valuable in itself, and therefore acceptable in the sight of God; as implying a wise and proper use of that faculty which God has given him for that purpose. And indeed it argues a high regard for truth, and the fittest disposition to receive and promote it; as being equally removed from the mischievous extremes of obstinacy and credulity. On the other hand, to believe implicitly is most unnatural, as well as unreasonable; as being directly repugnant to the nature of the understanding, which cannot yield a real assent without evidence, or the appearance of evidence. And indeed authority is evidence, if we consider it as vouching for matters of fact: but speculative and doctrinal points must be supported by very different proofs. In respect of these, therefore, implicit faith is a mere absurdity. For no man can really assent to them, till evidence work his conviction. A blind submission to human authority is so far from being laudable, that it is altogether inexcusable; as it prostitutes and perverts our noblest faculties,
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and reflects dishonour on the Author of them.

The precept in my text, just and gracious as it is, is yet industriously avoided on two opposite accounts. Some Christians represent it as impracticable, and others as needless. Some plead their own inability, and others the infallibility of their guides and directors. But surely neither of these pretences can either justify or excuse the neglect of so plain a duty. The former of them has indeed the appearance of modesty and caution, and seems to argue, in those who make use of it, an humble opinion of themselves, and their own attainments. But in reality there is no weight at all in the plea. Should Christians pretend an incapacity for acting as well as judging, and profess themselves unable to discharge the practical duties required of them; would this procure them a dispensation? In either case such a reason would hold good, and be certainly admitted, supposing it true; but since it is true in neither, it must be frivolous in both. Every man has power both to act and judge to a certain degree; and beyond the extent of his power his obligations never reach. God never requires of any man beyond the proportion of what he has given him. A considerable

siderable progress in knowledge is not indeed to be expected from the generality of mankind. Some want talents, and many more want time and opportunity for this sort of improvement. Nevertheless some things, and those of the greatest importance, are so obvious to every understanding, and so plainly and clearly taught in Scripture, that the knowledge of them can hardly be missed, unless they be wilfully overlooked. Scarce any degree of learning is needful to enable private Christians to judge, even of themselves, such points as these. Thus, for instance, when our Saviour requires that we *love God with all our hearts*, and our *neighbour as ourselves*: or when he declares, that *God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and truth*; is there almost any Christian so ignorant, or unintelligent, as not to be capable of judging, whether these, and the like doctrines, were dictated by a good spirit, or an evil one? If he readily perceives and confesses the former, and finds, at the same time, that the person who taught these doctrines had power to *raise the dead*: from these facts put together, may not any man, of the plainest understanding, conclude, that he who taught such doctrines, and wrought such miracles, must have had a commission from heaven;

heaven; or, in other words, be a true prophet!—But supposing that unlearned Christians are very prone to err in the use and exercise of their own judgments; can this be any argument for a blind resignation to authority? It is not in their power, and therefore they are not obliged to examine critically, and judge exactly; but it is in their power, and they are indispensably obliged to judge uprightly and honestly. And when this is the case, they are secure, whether truth or error fall to their lot. For it is not illumination, but integrity of mind, that recommends men to the favour of God. A blind submission can never please him, whatever be the consequence thereof; whereas an upright use of our understandings, being morally good and worthy, must ever be acceptable to him, even in the midst of error. Besides we are not obliged to examine such points as we plainly find are above our reach. The generality of Christians have nothing to do with the obscurities of religion, either revealed or natural. But the chief and most essential parts are so plain, that every man may, and therefore ought to judge of them. And if they do it with care, and in the simplicity and sincerity of their hearts, their duty is so far discharged, and they are secure at all events.

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The second pretence before-mentioned, for the disuse of private judgment, is infallibility, lodged, as we are told, in the guides and governors of the Christian church. And indeed, supposing this to be fact, the plea must be allowed a very strong one. For private judgment, on this supposition, becomes quite needless, and labour in vain. But, alas! this boasted claim is a mere groundless pretence, unsupported by evidence, and destitute of the least colour of probability. The texts of Scripture, which are produced in defence of it, say nothing at all to that purpose, till forced by a most unnatural interpretation. And that interpretation the claimants have effectually confuted, by maintaining the greatest errors, and grossest absurdities that perhaps the world ever heard of: as if they meant to prove their title to all truth, by publishing and propagating the most notorious falsehoods. To which might be added, were it needful in so clear a case, that the very nature of the thing affords a strong presumption of the falsity and absurdity of such a claim. For as this present life is a state of probation, we may naturally expect that all the dispensations of religion should be conformable thereto. A considerable part of our trial may well be supposed to consist in the manner

manner of conducting our understandings, and forming our judgments. From hence it must appear, whether we are lovers of truth, and pursue it with fidelity and probity; a test of the utmost importance, both to the glory of God, and the improvement of our own minds. But now this test is removed, and utterly destroyed, as far as religion is concerned, by that monstrous doctrine which we are considering. For infallibility undermines and subverts private judgment; on the use and exercise whereof such a trial manifestly depends.——I shall only add, that if our Saviour had designed to constitute infallible judges here on earth, he would certainly never have required men to judge for themselves, and *of themselves*, as we find in my text; but, instead thereof, have referred them to those unerring judges, and enjoined an absolute submission to all their determinations.

Upon the whole, as we regard the great ends before-mentioned, it behoves us to exert our faculties, and search after truth with our own eyes, as far as lies in our power. This our Lord not only permits, but commands; and how shall we answer it to him, or to ourselves, if we neglect so gracious a precept, and choose to follow in the dark pre-

sumptuous guides, and confident impostors? What folly and ingratitude must it be, to shut our eyes and understandings amidst so clear a light shining round about us? Can we be content thus to debase our nature, and, at the same time, dishonour Him who gave it us? The apostle exhorts Christians to imitate the innocence and simplicity of children, but not their ignorance and defect of judgment. He would have us be *children in malice*, but *men in understanding*. And what can be more unmanly, or more disparaging, than to resign our judgments implicitly to those assuming pretenders, who have made it their interest to subdue reason, and who erect their ambitious schemes on the ruins of human understanding? In opposition thereto, let us constantly examine, and *judge what is right*, by all those lights and helps which God has granted us; ever remembering, that there is no merit in blindly submitting to men's arrogant claims and groundless pretensions. It may deserve to be further considered, that if we have made a right use of our faculties, and thereby taken possession of the most important truths, we shall find ourselves obliged to adhere to them with steadiness and constancy. For to what purpose do we judge freely, and search diligently;

gently; to what purpose, do we take the liberty of *probing all things*, if we are not resolved to *hold fast that which is good*? Shall we suffer our judgments to be shaken by every wind of doctrine, or gust of humour? Shall we make our faith as variable as our fashions, and let our religion be continually new-moulded, merely for the sake of novelty? More particularly, shall we become willing to exchange a *Protestant Defender of our faith*, truly and properly so called, for such rulers and dictators as *Rome* shall think fit to send us? That ambitious youth, who is now attempting to seduce and enslave us, do we not know what are his aims, powers, and commissions? Is it not clear and certain, that he was born in the land of darkness, nursed in the bosom of superstition, and brought up at the feet of *Antichrist*? His obligations, his attachments to the patron and protector of his family, leave no room to doubt what might be expected from him. If then we duly value our rights and liberties; if we know how to estimate the best constitution in the world, and the purest religion upon earth; if we prefer knowledge to ignorance, light to darkness, and freedom to vassalage; if we had rather live under equal laws, than arbitrary power, and be ruled by a *sceptre of righteousness*,
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than a *rod of iron*; we shall utterly reject all such innovations, and stand fast in that happy choice which God has given us: and indeed we are bound so to do by the strongest and most sacred ties that can be thought of. To persevere in our fidelity is not only the voice of duty, but the call, the loudest call, of interest; every thing that is dear to us depends on it, and is intimately connected with it. Our constitution, as now happily settled, is the great *palladium* of our state; and if we transmit not this safe to posterity, they will have small reason to thank us for the rest.

What remains then but that we judge reasonably, and act vigorously, in our several stations, as becomes wise men, and good subjects? that we suffer not our minds to be deluded, or our allegiance to be shaken, either by force or fraud; but contribute our best endeavours to repel both? And, if nothing else be in our power, we may and ought to join in our prayers to the throne of grace, for the protection and succour of that Almighty arm, which has so often and signally interposed in our deliverance. The truth is, however we are threatened by our *enemies*, our principal danger arises from *ourselves*; I mean, our sins and provocations. Too much reason have we, God knows, to apprehend a

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storm from that quarter: and if we have deeply incurred the displeasure of heaven, and are marked out for correction, *vain is the help of man.* Let us therefore, in the first place, deprecate God's wrath, and implore his mercy; humbling ourselves before him, and acknowledging our misdeeds: let us approach him with contrite hearts, and sincere resolutions of amendment. If we render *him* propitious, our great point is gained; the danger will soon disappear, and our fears vanish. His arm will be extended in our favour, as it often has been; and we shall be enabled to serve him quietly, thankfully, and devoutly, all the days of our lives.

F I N I S.

